

Sarmad

Kashmiri

Sarmad

Martyr to Love Divine

Mystics of the East Series

Sarmad

Martyr to Love Divine

Isaac A. Ezekiel

RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS

Published by:
Jagdish Chander Sethi, Secretary
Radha Soami Satsang Beas
Dera Baba Jaimal Singh
Punjab 143204, India

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Fifth edition (revised) 2005

12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 81-8256-672-X

Printed in India at: Lakshmi Offset Printers, Delhi-110092

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*Oh my friends, I have a word to say,
listen if you will:*

*Keep drinking cups of this Wine
for as long as you can –
From this Cup of Jamshid you'll receive divine wealth.
Please do not forget these words.*

Sarmad

Part Two, Mystic Teachings



Mysticism

A Unique Method of Devotion

Carols, Chunks and Clowns

Intellectuals and Mrs. Grundy

The Path of the Hero

A Danger Signal

Oh my friend, I have a word to say
Listen if you will

Keep drinking cups of the Wine
For as long as you can -
From this Cup of Paradise you'll receive divine wealth
Please do not forget these words

Samadhi

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To my Master

Param Sant Satguru Sawan Singh Ji

There is a wonderful story about Jnaneshwar, a well-known Indian saint of the thirteenth century. His father was a brahmin who abandoned the world after leading a householder's life for some years in order to pursue the path of devotion with greater vigour. But after a few years he returned to the householder's life. This action was considered a grave violation of the orthodox injunction that a sanyasi, one who has renounced the world, should never go back on such a decision. Because of this, Jnaneshwar, who was born after his father's return to family life, was condemned as an outcast—too unholy even to read the Vedas.

When Jnaneshwar grew up, however, he began holding public discourses on the Vedas. One day, to express their indignation, a crowd of orthodox brahmins held a demonstration in front of his house. Jnaneshwar came out and found that discussion with the crowd would be useless. It is said that at that moment he saw a buffalo standing nearby and called upon it to recite the Vedas. The buffalo did so in the correct brahminical style. The crowd was confounded. It was sacrilegious to hear an animal reciting the Vedas, but they could not stop it. Further, if a buffalo could do this, then why not the child of a brahmin?

Dedication

I am no more competent to write this book than the buffalo in the above story was competent to recite the Vedas. It is only the grace of my Master, Param Sant Satguru Sawan Singh Ji—as well as his successors Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh Ji and Maharaj Charan Singh Ji—that has done this work through me. The deficiencies are the deficiencies of an incompetent buffalo that he has been pleased to use. The merits are entirely his. To him, therefore, I beg most humbly and reverentially to dedicate this book.

I.A. Ezekiel

1966

Preface

The seventeenth century mystic Sarmad set out on the ultimate odyssey, the journey inward to the centre and source of life—to the perfect joy of union with the divine.

His life and poetry have captured the hearts of Jews, Muslims and Hindus alike, each claiming him as one of their own. But Sarmad himself soared far beyond boundaries. He was not bound by the illusion that there is more than the One—the illusion that we are many, separate and different from each other. He left behind all concepts about God and religion, and even himself.

The theme of wonder and gratitude weaves like a luminous thread throughout Sarmad's verses. No matter how forgetful or rebellious we are, no matter how ignorant or arrogant, the Beloved within shows us only mercy and compassion, grace and forgiveness:

The ocean of his generosity has no shore.

The tongue is powerless to thank,
the heart too bewildered to understand.

Though my sins are many
his compassion is greater still –
I swim in the seas of disobedience
but I do not drown.

Preface

Yet finally, speaking from the vantage point of a Master, Sarmad says, "I cannot be known through my words." Words can never express the depth and intensity of the relationship between the disciple and the Friend within. The mystics' words may reawaken our longing for that love which never breaks, for that peace and happiness which will never tarnish. But words can only be signposts that point to the mystery beyond. The depth and intensity of love between the disciple and the Beloved is something to be experienced.

This book about the saint Sarmad—his life, teachings and poetry—is a revision of the original volume written by Isaac A. Ezekiel in 1966. Mr Ezekiel, a journalist from Bombay, was a disciple of Maharaj Sawan Singh, second in the line of Masters of Beas, India, who taught the way of self-realization and God-realization that is at the heart of all religions and philosophies. In this book Mr Ezekiel elaborates on the Science of the Soul, or Sant Mat, the teachings of the Saints. These teachings can be stated in a few simple sentences: There is one formless, boundless source of all love and life, and it is the privilege of human beings to experience this inner Reality. The journey begins with a teacher or guide who has experienced and become one with this Reality, and who guides the seeker to the same inner destination through the process of meditation on the Word, the Name, the 'voice' of God that resounds within everyone.

Mr Ezekiel narrates the story of Sarmad's life and martyrdom—a spiritual journey that led from Persia to India—and he weaves it into the larger picture of the Mughal empire of the time. The author also offers a great wealth of quotations and verses from classical religious texts, mystics, philosophers

Preface

and poets to demonstrate the unifying principles underlying all religions. In addition, he presents a fascinating array of parables and stories that illustrate the yearning for spirituality and the challenges of the inner quest.

In the forty years since this book was first published, the world has changed greatly. The global community shares vast amounts of research and information, and the demand for accuracy and detail has increased. In light of current publishing norms, the Life and Teachings sections have been altered where necessary. Information that could not be verified has been deleted, and passages that may have derived from interpretation or conjecture have been identified as such. Although some passages have been altered for accuracy and clarity, Mr Ezekiel's wonderful style of writing—rich with drama and literary flair—has been retained.

Much information has been added to this revision: two appendices offering discussions of biographical sources on Sarmad, a glossary, notes on books and authors referred to in the text, endnotes with sources for quotations and verses, and an extensive bibliography are now included.

A new rendering of Sarmad's Rubaiyat, based on a recent literal translation of the quatrains from the original Farsi, has replaced that of Mr Ezekiel. Ezekiel's style and embellishments have been retained where they support the meaning of the verses.

With simple eloquence, Sarmad calls us to become conscious. He calls us to wake up and adventure beyond this crumpled little dream we call 'life'. He calls us to embark on the journey within, so that we may see, love and finally become the Beloved. His life and death bore witness to the tenacity,

Preface

courage and boldness required for this supreme quest, but his words assure us that the reward is infinite:

I was set aflame like a candle in this gathering,
and through this burning
I became his intimate.

Sewa Singh
Secretary

Radha Soami Satsang Beas
May, 2005

Part One

The Life of Sarmad

courage and boldness required for this enterprise, but his words assure us that the reward is rich.

I was an officer in the British Army.

and then I was a

Part One

The Life of Samuel

Radio Sound Library

May 2, 1955

Prince among People

O Muslims, what can I do?
For I do not know myself.
I am not a Christian nor a Jew,
a fire worshipper nor a Muslim.
I am not of the East or the West,
nor of land nor of sea....
My dwelling is without location,
my trail without trace....
I have expelled duality myself.
I have seen the two worlds as one.
Let me seek One, say One,
know One and desire One.
He the First, He the Last,
He the Manifest, He the Hidden.
Without Him and other than Him
nothing else I know.

Rumi¹

Not far from Delhi's magnificent mosque, the Jama Masjid, stands a tomb where thousands of men and women of all religious affiliations gather every year to pay homage to a great saint. Here they offer flowers by tons, pour out perfumes and scents by gallons, and burn incense at the shrine of one who gave out spiritual fragrance all through his life. Here they light candles and lamps of various hues to one who lighted the path to Providence for earnest seekers. Here lie the mortal remains

The Life of Sarmad

of Sarmad, a servant of God who had become one with Him, and yet was accused of being an infidel and was persecuted and finally beheaded on that fantastic charge.

Muhammad Sa'id, commonly known by his nom de plume Sarmad, which means 'everlasting' or 'eternal', was a dynamic and popular saint, but very few facts are known about his parentage and early years in Persia.* From the scant information available, nonetheless, the story of Sarmad's life has come to be told by many. Some writers hold the view that he was born in the early part of the seventeenth century, while others conclude that he was born in 1590. As regards the place of his birth, it is generally held that it was Kashan, an important business centre of Persia that is located on the road from Teheran to Isfahan in modern Iran. It is generally believed that he was the scion of a wealthy Jewish family with a rabbinical background. There is no evidence to show that he was married and had children.

Being born of wealthy parents, Sarmad could afford an education beyond the reach of many other children. It is said that he was blessed with a sharp intellect, excellent memory, an amazing power of cognition and a marvellous capacity to assimilate facts. He studied the Jewish scriptures, and he committed the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) to memory and was qualified to function as a rabbi. He also studied the New Testament and other books on Christianity, as well as Islamic theology and science. In parallel, he also mastered the Arabic language, and few among his contemporaries were his equal in proficiency.

* Biographical information on Sarmad's early years in Persia and his religious background is based upon only three reliable sources. Please see Appendix 1 for this information. Appendix 2 offers a discussion of biographical sources on Sarmad's life after his migration to India.

It appears that two of his Islamic teachers, Mullah Sadra and Abul Qasim Fendereski, had profound influence on shaping Sarmad's future spiritual life. Being influenced by them, he embraced the mystic dimension of Islam and took the name of Muhammad Sa'id. Some scholars claim that he converted, if only nominally, to Islam,² but in truth he became a mystic whose teachings were not confined to the doctrine of any religion.

In his rubaiyat* he states that he was neither a Jew nor a Hindu nor a Muslim, but it appears that he will forever carry the Jewish label, for Persian and European writers refer to him as 'Sarmad the Jew', 'the Jewish merchant', 'the Jewish mystic', 'the Hebrew atheist' or 'the Hebrew pantheist'.

After completion of his education, Sarmad entered into his ancestral vocation. He carried on trade between Persia and India, exporting Persian rugs, dry fruits and other goods, and importing precious stones, Indian gold and silver wares, copper and brass works, and cotton and silk textiles that had earned renown in those days throughout the Middle East.

In furtherance of his business, in 1631 he paid a visit to India taking the traditional sea route through the Persian Gulf, and he stayed at Thatta, a flourishing commercial centre near Karachi of today. Almost immediately after his arrival, Sarmad met a Hindu boy named Abhai Chand, the son of a rajah or feudal ruler of Sindh.³ He was fascinated by this exceptionally beautiful young man. This love transformed the life of Sarmad.

Such a feeling of love is not alien to Sufis, mystics of Muslim background, because for them beauty in any form

* rubaiyat: literally, quatrains. Persian mystics created the literary style of the rubai, a short poem of four lines with a fixed metre in which the first, second and fourth lines usually rhyme.

constitutes an embodiment of God, the Creator. In the Sufi tradition mystical love between two people is celebrated. Through this union of souls all distinctions ultimately vanish; nothing remains but the essential unity of love. In seeking the company of this boy, Sarmad may have wondered: if a thing made of dust created by God could be so beautiful, what must be the glory of the Creator himself?

The boy's father, however, restrained his son from meeting Sarmad. According to Mu'tamad Khan, author of the well-known *Iqbal Nama-i Jahangiri*, the separation from the boy brought such distress and madness to Sarmad that he abruptly gave away all of his material possessions including his gold-worked garments and began to wander naked in the streets.

It wasn't long before Sarmad's love had a miraculous effect on the boy and his father, and Sarmad was allowed to visit their home. Abhai Chand became so attached to Sarmad that the boy left his home to be with him, and he became Sarmad's devoted disciple and inseparable companion.

Sarmad taught Abhai Chand the science and literature of the time as well as the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, and the Psalms of the Bible. Abhai Chand was a diligent student and became well-versed in the Old Testament, so much so that he could translate the first six chapters of the Book of Genesis into Persian. It is said that his translation was so elegant that it was incorporated, after review and correction by Sarmad, into *Dabistan-i Mazahib* (School of Religious Doctrines), the first comprehensive work in Persian on comparative religion. Material for the chapter on Judaism was supplied by Sarmad himself. On his contribution to *Dabistan*, Prof. Walter Fischel wrote: "Through the medium of *Dabistan* Sarmad became the channel through which Jewish

ideas, though with a Sufic blending, penetrated into the religious fabric of the India of his time."⁴

Sarmad could not live at Thatta forever. It was perhaps so ordained that the itinerant Jewish trader would soon become a spiritual itinerant and play a unique role in the religious as well as the intellectual life of India. Perhaps the innate urge in him to find the path that led to seeing God face to face made him leave Thatta and move along with his disciple from village to village, town to town, city to city, from one part of India to the other. During the course of his journey he visited Lahore, where the author Mu'tamad Khan met him in a garden in 1634. He wrote that he saw Sarmad lying naked with long 'crisped' hair all over his body and long fingernails. According to Khan, Sarmad was fairly popular there and even persons of high standing visited him.

It is not known how long Sarmad stayed at Lahore. After about thirteen years he was reported to have been seen in Hyderabad in 1647. No information is available as to how he spent these thirteen years. One might speculate that he was in seclusion, trying to find the pathway to God. People from all walks of life visited Sarmad and were benefited by his mystical quatrains, spiritual exhortations, divination and blessings. In Hyderabad, Sarmad was respected by King Abdullah Qutb Shah, his Chief Minister Sheikh Muhammad Khan and other dignitaries of the court. Mobed Shah, generally considered to be the author of *Dabistan*,* wrote that he was present in Hyderabad in 1649 when Sarmad predicted that one Mir Jumla would attain a high position in service. This prophesy

* The identity of the author of *Dabistan* is not conclusively established. It is generally held that it was written by Zulfikar Ali-al-Husaini, whose pen-name was Mobed Shah, but some ascribe the work to Mohsin Fani.

was fulfilled: Mir Jumla, who soon joined the Mughal army, eventually became the Governor of Bengal. In the same year Sarmad made another prophesy that Chief Minister Sheikh Muhammad Khan would soon die. The Chief Minister, being mystically inclined, took this sombre prediction very seriously and decided to meet his death in a befitting manner to gain spiritually. He set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca, but on the way his ship sank in a storm in the Arabian sea, and he and the other pilgrims died.

It cannot definitely be stated when Sarmad left Hyderabad. He was on a quest to find the true path leading to God, and in pursuance of his mission of meeting God face to face it is said that Sarmad, along with Abhai Chand, wandered through forests, trudged along mountain paths, visited sadhus (mendicant ascetics) and journeyed to the banks of India's holy rivers and the centuries-old places of pilgrimage. In his search for God he studied the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads and the Qur'an.* He observed the rites and rituals of various communities, celebrations of feasts and festivals, fasts and formal prayers—and found them all wanting. He visited maulvis (scholars and teachers of Islamic law), pundits (Hindu scholars and theologians) and various other philosophers and scholars of repute, and had long discussions with them. But they failed to give him the truth that he was seeking. Sarmad found no solace in formal religion:

Others find happiness in worldly wealth
and heavenly promise.

* For information on some of the books and authors mentioned in the text, as well as unfamiliar terms not explained, see Books and Authors Cited and the Glossary.

Prince among People

Pray spare me both – therein lies my happiness.
Ensnare me in your love, this is my desire!
Leave your veiled domain
and reveal your beauty.

Rubai 5

He found no comfort anywhere in the creation:

My heart searched for your fragrance
in the breeze moving at dawn,
my eyes searched for the flower of your face
in the garden of creation.
Neither could lead me to your abode –
contemplation alone showed me the way.

Rubai 8

At long last he came across a Master who showed him the path leading to God. As in the case of saints like Guru Nanak, Soami Ji Maharaj of Agra and Tulsi Sahib of Hathras, the identity of Sarmad's Master is not conclusively established, but it is believed that he was Khwaja Sa'id Abul Qasim, better known as Shah Hare Bhare of the Qadri sect of Sufis, with whom Sarmad and Abhai Chand stayed in Delhi. The quest was over:

If I am spiritual, this is an affair
between my Beloved and me.
I care not for the rosary or sacred thread.
The woolen cloak of renunciation
is burdened with a hundred hidden crimes –
this degradation I won't carry on my back.

Rubai 17

The Life of Sarmad

What did Sarmad's Master ask him to do? Sarmad explained that his Master asked him to search for God not in the world outside but within his own body. Here, after concentration and contemplation as taught by his Master, he found the Lord within himself:

Once I was bathed in the Light of Truth within,
I abandoned all planning and scheming.
If you, too, seek this transcendence,
leave your lower self – then from head to foot
you will see your whole being as God's refugence.

Rubai 157

Sarmad came to India as a merchant of worldly goods, but remained there to deal in spiritual merchandise. He came to purchase precious stones, but remained to become a merchant of mercy.

There was a time when this naked faqir, bereft of all property and position, held Delhi, the capital of the Mughal empire, in the hollow of his hand, and Emperor Aurangzeb trembled at the mention of his name. But he refused to use that power for his personal vanity and sacrificed his life for the glory of the Lord and in the service of his devotees. He shared with them the message of their grand spiritual heritage, the same message that is offered by all mystics, as expressed in Yog Vasishta:

Thou art the King's son, Sir! No jungle-child,
though lost in infancy in this vast wild
and reared by forest-folk, from Truth beguiled.⁵

Sarmad held that the best way to find eternity would be to seek union with God in this life, and that it was important for a person to attain knowledge of Truth before he died:

Do not rejoice in this perishable realm –
Whether king or beggar
you will not remain here forever.

In this drama of a few days, stay awake,
never for a breath forget the Friend.

Rubai 153

At your last breath the world will not be your friend.

Struggle on the path to God,
for He is friend and companion.

Should you wish to reach the Beloved,

I tell you, my friend, this is the only path.

Rubai 163

A Parallel

By going to Mecca the mystery is not obtained,
so long as the ego is not annihilated.

By going to the Ganga the mystery is not solved,
though you may take a hundred dips in it.

By going to Gaya the mystery is not solved,
though you may offer many rice-cakes at funerals.*

* Mecca, in present-day Saudi Arabia, is the most sacred city of Islam and the site of the most important pilgrimage. Ganga, also called the Ganges, is a sacred river in northern India. It is said that bathing in the Ganga wipes out sins. Gaya is a city in Bihar where Hindus go to conduct ceremonies for the benefit of their deceased.

The Life of Sarmad

O Bullah, salvation will be obtained
only when the 'I' is completely eliminated.

Bulleh Shah⁶

Sarmad's contemporary, Waleh Dagastani, wrote that India during their time was known as a land of great learning and scholarship, and that Sarmad was interested as much in India's vast wealth of knowledge as in India's trade. It is obvious from his poems that before renouncing the world he had a large circle of friends, a prosperous business and extensive social contacts, and that he led what is generally known as a good active life. Material poverty at the end of his life may seem to be a shocking contrast, but he was quite indifferent to such matters. His poems make it plain that he lived to quite an old age.

Sarmad made no direct reference in his rubaiyat to any particular incident in his life that inspired him to abandon his extensive business and his wide social contacts in order to start on a spiritual pilgrimage. All writers on Sarmad are unanimous, however, on the point that it was the intense love for a human being that awakened his spiritual transformation. To the Western reader it may be explained that the experience was by no means unique, nor even extraordinary. The transformation of *ishq-i majazi* (earthly love) into *ishq-i haqiqi* (love divine) is quite a common theme in the lives of saints, especially those of the Sufis. With the Sufis of the medieval times, beauty in any form was considered a manifestation of the Lord, the Creator, and they considered that its adoration would lead them to Him.

Commenting on the incident that triggered the transformation of Sarmad's life, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad said that the soul that has not been set ablaze by love in some form or another is like a piece of ice that may melt with heat and turn

into water, but can never give light. Only a lamp that can be ignited can ultimately give light to others.

The revolutionary transformation of Sarmad's love for a human being into love divine has more than one parallel in spiritual literature. It happened, for example, in the life of Saint Tulsidas, author of the *Ramcharitmanas*, which is a favourite book of devout Hindus. It is said that Tulsidas had such an intense love for his wife that he could not bear separation from her for a single day. Some time after his marriage, when their only son died in infancy, his wife, according to Indian custom, went to her father's house to live there for some time.

Soon after she had left, the sky became cloudy, and by the time she reached her parents' home, a terrible storm burst over the area. Tulsidas, unable to stand separation from his wife, defied the storm and set out at night for his father-in-law's house. It was pitch dark, there was ceaseless rain and storm, and the river he had to cross was in flood. No boatman was available to take him across. Tulsidas saw a bamboo frame lying on the bank, and so love-infatuated was he that he used that frail frame to cross the river.

At midnight, on reaching the house, he found its doors and windows barred and bolted against the storm. He also found what he thought was a rope tied to the balcony of the room that his wife occupied. He climbed up with the help of the 'rope' and knocked at the door. His wife was thoroughly ashamed of her husband's behaviour and asked him how he had managed to climb up to the room. He replied that he had used the rope that she had tied to the balcony. She had not tied any rope, and when she walked outside she discovered that it was in fact a cobra, frightened by the storm and hanging onto the branch of a tree, that Tulsidas had grasped and climbed.

Then she asked him how he had crossed the river and he answered that he had used the bamboo frame she had left on the other side of the bank. She had not left any frame and, on going to the bank, found that he had used a bamboo bier discarded after being used to carry a dead body to the river.

Tulsidas's wife was moved by the madness of such love and told him most tenderly that if he would only direct that love to God he would become a great saint. The remark touched him deeply, and he asked her if he was free to give her up in search of God. She agreed, and immediately he left the house and ultimately became a renowned saint.

Many years later, a touching scene was enacted. One day Tulsidas's disciples unknowingly took him to his old house. His wife recognized him and told him so.

"I am a different person now," he told her.

"To me you will always be the same," she replied, while a flood of tears flowed from her eyes.

It was such a love of God that burnt to ashes all ego and attachment for the world in Sarmad, and the message that he carried to his devotees was:

If you desire never to stumble on the stony path,
forsake ego, do not hesitate.

Never surrender to your heart's desires,
be ever at war with your tyrant mind.

Rubai 164

My friend, engage your heart in his embrace
and rise to the inner sky.

Do not forget the words of this devotee:

Erase both worlds from your heart.

Rubai 238

Wolves and Tigers

Worldly people bring many anxieties,
this thicket is full of wolves and tigers.

In the company of those with hearts of stone,
the glass goblet of your heart
is ever in danger of being shattered.

Rubai 297

In the course of his quest for the Lord, Sarmad's business life came to an end. So did his old associations, religious attachments and social contacts. The joyous feasts and banquets he formerly enjoyed in his native country were a story of the past. Now he found no delight in the ephemeral pleasures of the world:

In gardens and meadows, in the company of friends,
an intoxication of words and wine was in the air.

But in the end these dear ones departed,
only their words remained –
this blue dome no longer allowed them to stay.

Rubai 12

Now his mind took a complete turnabout, and he no longer hankered after wealth, society, position and authority, but began singing a different tune:

If you desire eternal joy and freedom from misery,
retreat from people and seek solitude.

This will bring rest and peace in both the worlds.

Hear this from me and choose tranquillity.

Rubai 230

The Life of Sarmad

If you wish to escape from life's vexations
keep away from worldly people.
Take them all for snakes and scorpions,
seek refuge from their company.

Rubai 254

The seeker's path is strewn with thorns, hedges and pitfalls. The world that never truly loved Sarmad when he was of it, now hated him with all intensity when he abandoned it in search of the Lord. Sarmad faced the spite and the slander with dauntless courage and pursued his path with relentless zeal. He wrote:

Hundreds of my friends became enemies,
but the friendship of the One gave solace to my heart.
I chose oneness – now I am free of the many.
I became his and He became mine at last.

Rubai 97

Sarmad saw through earthly affection and the selfishness of earthly friendship which seeks to turn friendship into a counter of commerce:

Friendships in this world are based on a loaf of bread;
none have I seen who love from their soul.
Like dogs they run from door to door for a morsel,
and this they call friendship and support.

Rubai 101

While pursuing the higher path, Sarmad had to avoid a thousand temptations. Old friends and associates became a

Wolves and Tigers

serious menace. Some came in the guise of well-wishers and advised him to abandon the hard and lonely path and to return to the days of ease and comfort, wealth and honour. Against them he warned:

Do not be careless of danger among the worldly,
nor be happy in their warmth.
Flee their company,
so in this cage of deceit
you won't become the prey
of all those in the throes of death.

Rubai 289

In the course of his struggle, Sarmad saw the uselessness of austerities, formal prayers, congregational meetings that did not touch the heart, and rites and rituals that had lost all significance. He declared this in no uncertain terms:

O ascetic! What sweet pleasure
have you tasted in this hypocrisy?
You have woven a hundred cloaks together
to show off your piety,
and from the thread of your rosary, fine as a hair,
you have made a strong rope for hanging yourself.

Rubai 276

Sarmad then began openly denouncing the hypocrisy and ostentatious piety of priests who, although blind themselves, were seeking to lead the blind—ignorant of the existence of their own soul, yet seeking to lead other souls to the Lord:

The Life of Sarmad

O friend, don't be proud of your show of piety,
your arrogance will bring you affliction.
They call you pious but, quite frankly,
you're a hypocrite, a libertine at large.
You're a filthy crow
yet you pose as pure camphor.*

Rubai 128

He answered with great clarity the charge that he was a
naked infidel and an idol worshipper:

The king of kings I am, O you ascetic,
I am not naked like you.
All ardour and joy of love I am,
not distracted like you.
Idol worshipper and non-believer I am,
not one of the faithful flock.
I go to the mosque, but I am not a Muslim.†

Rubai 219

Why did Sarmad say, "I am the king of kings"? Was it ego?
Far from it. Why did Christ say, "I and my Father are one"?⁷
Was it ego? How are the disciples to know the truth unless they
are given some hint about it? It is out of sheer love for their
devotees that the saints speak of their oneness with Divinity.

Sarmad's teachings touched the souls of the simple-hearted,
unsophisticated masses of Delhi, who listened to him with rapt
attention and treated him as a messenger of God. He showed

* Camphor is a white crystalline compound that is burned as incense to
purify the atmosphere.

† Muslim here refers to one who practises orthodox religious rituals and
ceremonies.

Zenith of Achievement

them the path to salvation that was easy to understand, free of philosophical complexities and the emptiness of formalism. But the message angered the priesthood and others who trafficked in religion and profited by external piety, and that anger rapidly developed into a raging fury that sought revenge. Sarmad, however, was not afraid of anyone and did exactly what he wanted to do. As we will see shortly, he could not be intimidated even by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb.

Speaking of the kind of courage that saints and their true devotees show when travelling the higher path, Mira Bai, the great mystic and Queen of Chittor said:

When I started meeting saints,
the ruling sovereign rushed to kill me.
At another time he repeated his attempt
by serving me with poison, but I was fearless.
It mattered not if the whole world
stood arrayed against me, me alone with my Lord.
I broke all worldly ties and society's rules,
and told the Rana [ruler]
To beware of my madness for the Lord.⁸

Zenith of Achievement

One thing alone is not possible for man: to be deathless. But it is possible for him to attain union with God, provided he realizes that he can do so.

*The Philokalia*⁹

By now Sarmad had a large number of followers attending his discourses, but not necessarily as seekers of God. Most came for earthly gain, or to secure cures for worldly ills such

as fear, distress, misery and ill health. But still they followed him with implicit faith and love, and he did not hesitate to tell them the truth in plain language. In verse after verse he expressed the fact that of the thousands who followed him wherever he went, few were really in earnest:

This strange sight have I seen:

Everyone begs God for riches and salvation,

or asks for a silver-skinned, moon-faced beauty.

But my desolate heart seeks neither this nor that,

it is yearning for union with Him – nothing else.

Rubai 123

In his attempt to make people look within themselves, he explained that the Beloved is found in the spiritual 'garden' within every person, rather than in the Ka'aba,* the mosque or the temple:

The lover and the Beloved, the idol, the idol maker
and the imposter – they're all one.

In the Ka'aba, mosque and temple is the same
one Beloved.

If you come into this garden you will find one colour –

The lover and Beloved, the rose and thorn are one.

Rubai 54

The path to God-realization was not an easy one. It was a long and weary struggle pursued with relentless determination in the face of spiritual pain, suffering, defeat and frustration:

* Ka'aba: the 'House of God' in the centre of the courtyard of the great mosque at Mecca, toward which all Muslims turn at the time of prayers.

Zenith of Achievement

O Lord, why is my heart grieving?
Tell me!
How long will I live in agony?
Tell me!
Though I am full of evil,
 forgive me in your generosity.
Who, if not You, will show me mercy?
Tell me!

Rubai 262

O You who shimmer within,
 lift the veil, reveal yourself!
I am lost in the realm of the mind
 searching for You.
I long to hold You close –
 Oh, how long will You keep yourself concealed?

Rubai 4

Then the struggle was intensified with the agony caused
by separation from the Lord, the Beloved:

Oh the agony! My capricious Friend
 does not even look at me – what should I do?
The sighs of my heart have no effect –
 what should I do?
Though He is ever in my heart,
 ever heedless of my heart He remains –
What should I do?

Rubai 181

But he sought fresh courage, strengthened himself and
decided to carry on with the battle:

The Life of Sarmad

In the slaughterhouse of love
none but the good are slain,
those weak of character are spared.
If you are a sincere lover, do not flee –
Those not slain here are nothing but carcasses.

Rubai 112

O Sarmad, if He is faithful He will come.
If his coming is destined, He will come of his own will.
Why do you run after Him in vain? Sit in peace.
If He is Khuda, He will come himself.*

Rubai 72

People began condemning Sarmad for his 'madness', for the total lack of reason in a man who was otherwise so intelligent and learned. He replied:

The madness of my heart is the perfection of wisdom,
but the chaos of love
is beyond the grasp of the mind.

Rubai 166

The tears of my heart have become an ocean.
Madly infatuated with roaming the desert,
I have taken vows of solitude and shun company.
In companionship with the *anqa*†
I have become alone.

Rubai 186

* a play on words: Khuda (*khudaa*) means the Lord, while Khud-a (*khud-aa*) means 'comes himself' or 'comes on his own'.

† *anqa*: a mythical celestial bird that lives in the skies and keeps no contact with the earth

Zenith of Achievement

At last, the struggle was approaching the end as he attained great spiritual heights:

Sarmad, who lost himself in the Wine,
reached Sarmadi through love.*
Even the executioner's sword
could not bring him back to his senses –
He found his abode
in the domain of the Praised Ones.†

Rubai 46

Finally came the stage when he ceased to have an existence separate from God. The unity of the soul and the Supreme Soul seemed to be complete:

He and I are one,
like the word and its meaning.
Behold union in separation,
like the eye and vision.
Not for a moment is He separate from me –
Behold us together everywhere,
like flower and fragrance.

Rubai 145

I have been annihilated and do not know
what existence is.
I have become a blaze and do not know what smoke is.

* Sarmad plays on the meaning of his name here: Sarmadi means 'the eternal state'.

† those who have achieved sainthood and are praised by angels and humans alike.

The Life of Sarmad

I have surrendered my heart, soul and faith.
I have struck a bargain, but I do not know
what profit is.

Rubai 68

Thus Sarmad, having first found God within his own body, made the astounding discovery that the Lord abides in the entire creation. Upon finding God everywhere, he said:

He dwells not only in temples and mosques –
The whole creation is his abode.
The whole world is bewitched by his tale,
but wise are those who are lost in his love.

Rubai 49

At the Royal Court

God desires that you learn to bear trials without comfort,
that you may yield yourself wholly to Him, and grow
more humble through tribulation.

Thomas à Kempis¹⁰

It is not known when exactly Sarmad left Hyderabad and reached Delhi, the capital of the Mughal empire, nor what he was doing during this period. It can be safely assumed that he reached Delhi just two or three years prior to Emperor Shah Jahan (the Mughal emperor who built the Taj Mahal) falling ill and leaving for Agra in 1657 to recuperate. According to B.A. Hashmi: "Towards the close of Shah Jahan's reign, he (Sarmad) had reached the Gangetic plain. I think his wanderings took the natural course of a tourist of those days and he

eventually reached the great metropolis of the Mughals about the year 1654.”¹¹

Sarmad's fame as a poet and a mystic had preceded him and people thronged to see him upon his arrival in Delhi, as they were eager to hear his rubaiyat. Though they were surprised to see him walking about naked, they did not hold it against him but rather overlooked it saying that he, as a spiritually absorbed person, need not follow the norms of society. After all, they had seen many ascetics, notably Digambar Jain monks, moving about naked in Delhi—nakedness was considered by these ascetics a deliberate mark of not being bound to the norm. According to the author of the *Dabistan*, Sarmad pointed out that the Prophet Isaiah had gone about naked in his old age.¹² Of course the orthodox nobility would not have been very much pleased about Sarmad's walking about naked. One European writer who was present in Delhi at that time, François Bernier, wrote in his *Travels in the Mogul Empire*: “I was for a long time disgusted with a celebrated Fakir, named Sarmad, who paraded the streets of Delhi as naked as when he came into the world.”¹³

However, there was one member of the nobility who was very much impressed by Sarmad's mystical utterances and quatrains. Dara Shikoh, the heir apparent to Shah Jahan's throne, had a spiritual bent of mind and stood for religious unity. He intended to reconcile the Hindu-Islamic world on the basis of Sufi concepts, and at his insistence Sarmad met him often in his court. About their friendship Sher Khan Lodi, a writer in Sarmad's time, scornfully stated in his book *Mirat al-Khayal* that since Sultan Dara Shikoh had a liking for lunatics, he invited Sarmad to his court and enjoyed his discourses for a considerable time.

Dara was very much fascinated by Sarmad's genius, great erudition and spiritual grandeur, and he desired to present the saint to Emperor Shah Jahan, his father, who also held mystics and spiritual adepts in high regard. Before extending an invitation to Sarmad to visit the royal court, the Emperor deputed a nobleman, Inayat Khan, to meet the saint in order to ascertain his state and station as well as to verify his miraculous powers. On seeing the outward appearance of Sarmad, Inayat Khan was very much disappointed and sent the following sarcastic remark about Sarmad's spiritual powers to the Emperor:

To ascribe miracles to the naked Sarmad

is to accuse him —

The miracle (*kashf*) that is visible

is the revelation (*kashf*) of his private parts.¹⁴

The Emperor found the report flippant and prejudiced and said, "A piece of rough cloth [to cover his nakedness] could silence the scandalous tongue."¹⁵ Sarmad never cared for the objections of the priests and the orthodox nobles. But according to Niccolao Manucci, Sarmad, out of courteous regard for Dara, would wear a loin cloth when he went to meet him.¹⁶

Whether Shah Jahan himself received Sarmad at the royal court is doubtful. But the scandalous tongues could do no damage to the reputation of Sarmad for the time being. The Emperor was tolerant for the sake of the crown prince, and the orthodox nobles kept their murmur of disapproval to themselves for fear of the crown prince—and bided their time.

With the passing of days the bond of friendship between Dara and Sarmad grew stronger and stronger. Sarmad became his guide, friend and philosopher. Dara raised probing and

disturbing questions about matters of spirituality, and Sarmad's novel and convincing answers and interpretations so fascinated Dara that he spent days and nights in the company of the saint. The answers to some of his questions fell outside the pale of *shariah* (Islamic religious law), and orthodox scholars would have shuddered to respond to them. A number of letters were exchanged between the two, but it is unfortunate that only one letter of Dara to Sarmad, and his reply, are available to posterity.

In this letter Dara addressed Sarmad as 'my Pir' and preceptor' and enquired into the paradox of human versus divine action. Mentioning the murder of Imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, he asked Sarmad whether the murder was the will of God. If it was not the will of God he wanted to know the meaning of the phrase: "God does whatever He wills, and commands whatever He intends". Dara noted that even when the Prophet Muhammad was engaged in battles with infidels, the army of Islam sometimes met with defeat. Orthodox scholars said that this was meant as an "education in resignation", but Dara wanted to know what education was necessary for a perfect man like Muhammad. Sarmad sent a terse yet beautiful reply, addressing Dara as "my dear friend" and revealing that he had moved beyond all these questions put forward by the mind:

Forgotten has been what we read;
the Friend's Name only sung instead.¹⁷

Dara's manner of addressing Sarmad with great respect and regard, as mentioned above, led some writers to believe

* Pir: a spiritual guide; a Muslim saint.

that Sarmad was Dara's teacher.* Dara was indeed an eager and enthusiastic seeker of information in the realm of religion and spirituality, and very sincere in his studies. Once, being highly pleased with Dara's earnestness in widening his knowledge and with his abiding interest in matters spiritual, Sarmad told him that one day he would become the monarch.

Deeply interested in theology, comparative religious studies and mysticism, and busy with translating the Upanishads into Persian as well as writing books,† Dara chose to spend most of his time with scholars, mystics and spiritual leaders of the various religious hues. About Dara's association with them, Niccolao Manucci wrote with his prejudiced pen thus:

Dara had no religion. When with Mohammedans, he praised the tenets of Mohammed; when with Jews, the Jewish religion; in the same way, when with Hindus he praised Hinduism.... He had great delight in talking to the Jesuit fathers on religion, and making them dispute with his learned Mohammedans, or with a Hebrew called Cermad (Sarmad), an atheist much liked by the prince.¹⁸

Dara's catholicity of views in religious matters and liberal outlook aroused suspicion and opposition among the Muslim theological authorities in Delhi. His preoccupation

* Another perspective is from Bernier, who records: "Mullah Shah, a native of Badakshan, was the Murshid or spiritual guide of Dara Shikoh, and was highly respected by Shah Jahan. He died in Kashmir about the year 1660." (*Travels in the Mughal Empire*, p.154)

† Dara Shikoh wrote a number of books such as *Majma al-Bahrain* (The Mingling of the Two Oceans) and *Safinat al-Auliya* (A Biography of Saints) in which he gave expression to his Sufic ideas and views concerning the reconciliation of Hinduism, the traditional faith of India, and Islam.)

with spiritual matters and scholastic pursuits resulted in his neglecting his state responsibilities as the heir apparent to the throne. Further, according to some writers there were serious flaws in his behaviour: he was hot-tempered and outspoken, which alienated the sympathies of most of the nobles. For his neglect of state duties, for his liberal Akbarian views* in religious matters and lack of tact while dealing with the nobles and the orthodox Muslim clergy he had soon to pay very dearly. In this constellation of circumstances the unscrupulous plot that was being hatched behind his back by his wily and ambitious younger brother Aurangzeb, the third son of Emperor Shah Jahan, began to unfold, much to his consternation and surprise.

Aurangzeb executed the plot ruthlessly. He succeeded in deposing and imprisoning Shah Jahan, who was in Agra for recuperation, and ascended the throne in 1658. The old man had to pass his remaining days in captivity in the Agra fort. Dara, the crown prince, was accused of being an enemy of Islam, an apostate and heretic who was fond of the company of men of other beliefs, thus threatening the established religion of the Mughal Empire. The crafty Aurangzeb started a fratricidal war and killed Dara as well as his other brothers, cousins and nephews and everyone else who could lay claim to the throne. The liberal days of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan were over. Fanaticism was now seated firmly on the throne. The year was 1659.

* Dara Shikoh was the great-grandson of Emperor Akbar (1542–1605), who was noted for his religious tolerance. He created an amalgamation of beliefs and offered a tolerant and monotheistic religion, *din-i illahi*. It is said that the only real spiritual heir of Akbar was Dara Shikoh.

Dara was finished, but Sarmad, his teacher, still remained. It was in the scheme of intrigue of Aurangzeb to liquidate all those associated closely with Dara, as he feared that they would act against him and foment trouble. He got rid of most of them on political pretexts. Then he turned his attention to Sarmad, Dara's well-wisher and guide. Aurangzeb regarded him as a dangerous heretic because he belonged to Dara's inner circle and he had prophesied that Dara would become king. Aurangzeb, who was greatly perturbed about this prediction until he captured the throne, could never forgive Sarmad for this prophesy. Sarmad was considered to be a thorn in his side. The usurper's thought was how to get rid of Sarmad; the subterfuge of religious disbelief was needed as Sarmad was popular among the masses. Such subterfuge was not difficult to be found.

The priests, whom Sarmad used to denounce, were no friends of his, and they conspired to hatch one plot after another against him. They reminded Aurangzeb that Sarmad had predicted that Dara would become the monarch. They stoked the fire of Aurangzeb's hatred of Sarmad—warning him that Sarmad was so popular that a word from the saint would set the whole of Delhi and the surrounding areas against the Emperor and hurl him down from his throne. The accusations of the priests fit well into the Emperor's scheme against Sarmad.

Aurangzeb summoned Sarmad to the palace to explain his seditious conduct. Sarmad explained that he was not interested in giving any earthly kingdom to anyone and that he had referred only to the kingdom of heaven when he had spoken to Dara on the subject. According to Manucci, when asked where his devoted prince was, Sarmad brusquely replied to Aurangzeb that Dara was present, "but you cannot see him,

for you tyrannize over those of your own blood; and in order to usurp the kingdom, you took away the life of your brothers and did other barbarities.”¹⁹

On finding Aurangzeb still unconvinced, Sarmad asked him to close his eyes and see things for himself. Then a miracle happened: it is said that in a vision Aurangzeb saw Dara seated on the throne of heaven, with himself appearing before Dara as a beggar, pleading for mercy. The miracle startled and angered Aurangzeb and from then on he became Sarmad's deadly enemy. Aurangzeb's one thought now was how he might hasten to snuff out Sarmad so that he might not diminish the emperor's dignity by showing the same miracle to others.

Regarding the danger of those like Aurangzeb who wield worldly power as well as their own powerful egos, the author Mikhail Naimy in *The Book of Mirdad* notes:

A crown of gold studded with diamond, ruby and sapphire sits very cumbrous, sad and ill at ease upon the head swollen with vainglory, ignorance and lust for power over men. Aye, such a crown, so pedestalled, is but a stinging mockery of its own pedestal.²⁰

In connection with the charge of sedition and other charges subsequently brought against Sarmad, it must be made clear that the rule of law, as we know it today, was unknown during the Mughal regime. There was no codified law, no fixed legal procedure and no need for lawyers, witnesses and cross-examinations. Everything depended on the whims and fancies of the Emperor.

Nor was the principle of the freedom of conscience known in those days. Any Muslim who departed from the orthodox

practices could be brought to book and punished by the chief qazi* or even the Emperor himself. Charges of violation of religious practices that appear so stupid today could be brought against anyone on the slightest pretext, and heavy sentences were passed.

Therefore, it was simple for the priests to think of planning another way to wreak vengeance on Sarmad. The hatred of the priests matched that of Aurangzeb, and they were now after his blood. The chief qazi, Abdul Wahab, was the religious-judicial head of Delhi. It is said that once he went to the Jama Masjid where Sarmad was seated and asked him why he was going about naked. The chief qazi was also known as Mullah Qavi—'qavi' meaning 'strong'. Sarmad replied, "Because *shaitan* is Qavi," which had a double meaning: 'because Satan is strong' and 'because Qavi (the qazi) is Satan'.

The chief qazi was filled with rage and fury and approached Aurangzeb to ask for a capital sentence on Sarmad for violating the Islamic injunction against nakedness. Aurangzeb heard the evidence, but dismissed the case on the ground that the charge was too trivial for capital punishment.

The priests then plotted to give Aurangzeb a visual demonstration of the truth of their charge. Aurangzeb visited the Jama Masjid every Friday. The long flight of steps leading to the mosque is very wide and sometimes Sarmad used to lie on one of these steps, watching the hurly-burly of the world running after things evanescent. It may be mentioned here that the Jama Masjid is a very large edifice with three magnificent domes, two tall minarets, a vast central hall and many side-rooms where one could sit in meditation for hours

* qazi: administrator of Islamic religious law.

without disturbance. Sarmad used to visit the mosque for this purpose—any quiet place is good enough for a mystic's meditation.

On a certain Friday, the priests arranged with Aurangzeb's coachman for the Emperor's carriage to halt at a place that would compel Aurangzeb to take notice of Sarmad. Everything went according to the plan. Aurangzeb got out of the carriage in front of the naked Sarmad. Passing by Sarmad, Aurangzeb said to him, "You are a wise and learned man. You have a large following. Why do you go about naked? Why don't you cover yourself with the blanket lying at your feet? Why don't you dress properly?"

Legend has it that Sarmad asked the Emperor to spread the blanket over him if he so desired. Aurangzeb picked up the blanket, but was stunned with sudden terror. For lo and behold! he saw enfolded in the blanket the chopped-off heads of his brothers, cousins and nephews, dripping red with blood. Then Sarmad asked him whether he should use the blanket to cover his own physical nakedness or Aurangzeb's moral nakedness. Aurangzeb trembled from head to foot, dropped the blanket and hobbled along as best as he could into the Jama Masjid. The incident shook him to the core of his being. Sarmad made a reference to this encounter in his rubaiyat:

He who gave you a crown of rulership
gave poverty and bewilderment to me.
Those who were blemished He clothed,
those without blemish
He clothed in nakedness.

Rubai 105

Martyrdom

Beware, O you who stab the selfless one –
You are stabbing yourself!
The selfless one has merged in God and is safe;
he dwells in safety forever.

Rumi²¹

But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom
[of heaven], and possess the kingdom for ever, even for
ever and ever.

Bible, *Daniel* 7:18

In time, Sarmad, who was looked upon by millions as one of the great servants of God and who had discarded worldly wealth and embraced poverty in the service of the Lord, was charged by the chief qazi with blasphemy against the Creator. On the day of his trial, a vast crowd gathered outside Delhi's historic Red Fort, over which today flies the flag of free and independent India.

Inside, Emperor Aurangzeb sat on the judgement seat facing the 'saint of insanity'. The court hall was filled to capacity with dignitaries of state, religious heads, learned men and the elite of society. The chief qazi accused Hazrat Sa'id Sarmad of not reciting the whole of the *kalima-i taiyaba*, the basic affirmation of the Muslim faith: *La ilaha illallah muhammad ul rasul allah* (There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet). He had been reciting only the first part of it, "There is no god," and thus stood accused of preaching and practising blasphemy and violating the teachings of the Qur'an. Aurangzeb then asked Sarmad what he had to say. Sarmad straight away admitted the truth of the charge.

The trial had been arranged to demonstrate to Sarmad's admirers and followers that due process of law was being followed, whereas in actuality it was only to camouflage the real intention of the Emperor to get rid of Sarmad because of his close association with Dara.²² The prosecutors and the judges being the same people, the judgement was a foregone conclusion. The year was 1660 and Sarmad, the venerable saint, was found guilty of heresy and sentenced to death!

The crowd outside heard the sentence with utter dismay and lingered on with drooping heads and tears in their eyes, for it was to Sarmad that they had always run for solace in facing the trials and difficulties of life, and he had given comfort to them all. The millions could not all have been his spiritual disciples, but they loved him intensely. He was father and mother to them—pure, godly, head and shoulders above the common rank. And now the Emperor had decreed that he was to be beheaded.

Public resentment against the barbarous sentence was rising fast, and delay in executing the sentence might have led to ugly developments. So Aurangzeb took two swift measures. He ordered the execution to take place the very next day, and he called out the military in full force to occupy Delhi and strike terror in the hearts of the people. Every street, lane and byway in the capital and all strategic places were occupied by the military. Delhi looked like a besieged city, beleaguered by its own ruler, and the military were withdrawn only many days after the execution of Sarmad. At the appointed time, Sarmad was taken to the spot opposite the Jama Masjid where his tomb now stands. Unlike Dara Shikoh's death in a dark cell, Sarmad's execution was made a public affair as a warning to anyone who dared to do anything against the orthodox

The Life of Sarmad

observances of religion or the policies of the State. Far from resenting his death, Sarmad welcomed it as the will of God. Legend holds that as the executioner approached, Sarmad, with a smile and in a voice full of compassion, said:

The Friend with the naked sword has now arrived.

In whatever disguise Thou mayest come

I recognize Thee.²³

Then with Socratic courage* he placed his head below the sword of the executioner. It is said that before the severed head fell down it opened its mouth and recited the whole *kalima* thrice: "There is no god but God, and Muhammed is his prophet."

Then followed a most amazing scene. It is recounted that the headless body of Sarmad stood up, picked up its head, held it aloft and carried it up the steps of the Jama Masjid proclaiming, "*Ana al-Haq*" (I am God). The crowd was astounded at the spectacle—they wept and cried and howled. Then legend has it that Sarmad's Master appeared in his astral form and told Sarmad that he had rendered enough service to his devotees and others by showing his unity with God, and that he should now submit to the course of nature. Immediately the body dropped and the crowd dispersed. But they never forgot him. For generations thereafter and until this very day, Delhi's masses still remember him with love and affection. His tomb near the Jama Masjid in Delhi is a centre of attraction

* Socrates was a great thinker, philosopher and teacher who was accused of corrupting young minds and sentenced to death by poison. When the executioner hesitated to deliver the bowl of poison to him, Socrates told the executioner to do his duty and give him the bowl. He then drank the poison.

and pilgrimage. It is ironic that by the execution of Sarmad, Aurangzeb unwittingly made him a great martyr, and his quatrains came to be respected as sacred.

As mentioned earlier, Sarmad was first tried for going about naked, but when Aurangzeb dismissed the charge as too trivial for the death sentence, the chief qazi brought up another charge, that of atheism, because he did not repeat the entire *kalima*. It is explained by some writers that Sarmad did not repeat the whole *kalima* because he had not seen God within himself till the time of his execution, and that to admit the existence of anyone without tangible proof was tantamount to giving false evidence. They reason that after his execution he did see God, and thus rose up and repeated the *kalima* thrice before dropping down dead.

This explanation is not convincing for more than one reason. Sarmad's poems reveal that he was no atheist and that he had experienced God-realization long before his execution and could have had no hesitation in declaring the oneness of God. Further, repeating the *kalima* is a mere formality, and saints do not attach any importance to such formalities.

Sarmad was not the only mystic who has been executed on the foisted charge of apostasy or blasphemy. Nor was he the only one who has had to face death for proclaiming the truth. Sixteen hundred years before him Jesus Christ declared, "I and my Father are one," and faced crucifixion. Seven hundred years before him, Mansur, a well respected Sufi saint, stated the identical truth: he repeatedly exclaimed "*Ana al-Haq*" (I am God), for which he was hacked to pieces under the orders of the Caliph of Baghdad in 922.

And it is said that Shams-i Tabriz, the renowned Persian saint, had to face death on an identical charge. When the King

of Balkh-Bokhara lost his only son, the heir apparent to the throne, people at the court urged the ruler to request Shams to bring his son back to life. The ruler agreed and the dead body was carried to the house of the saint.

"I hope you will not punish me for bringing the boy back to life," he warned the ruler.

"How could I do that?" asked the King. "I shall be grateful to you till the last breath of my life."

The story is told that Shams-i Tabriz then came near the body and three times repeated, "May the Lord be pleased to bring the body back to life." But the prayer failed. Then Shams said, "I command that the boy come back to life," and immediately the dead boy rose to his feet. The ruler was very happy, but the next day a crowd of maulvis approached the ruler and told him that Shams had tried to show, by reviving the prince through his own power, that he was greater than God and thus had committed blasphemy. They said that such a person must suffer the penalty of death. The king yielded to the pressure of the priests and ordered Shams to be flayed alive. And so one can go down the unbroken line of saints to hear the same story repeated again and again.

Like Sarmad, the great Sufi saint Nasir-i Khusro was also condemned as an idolater and a kafir, a non-believer. Yet he declared:

If problems like this scare you, away with you!

because we dare to search for answers....

Invalids find the taste of sugar disgusting; no wonder
you think us unbelievers.²⁴

Maghrebi, another Sufi saint, goes so far as to define being an infidel in terms of possessing love for spiritual truth:

An Unhappy Record

That which is infidelity for others is religion for us.
The sourness and bitterness of all the world
is sweet for us....

True infidelity means to shroud oneself with the Truth.²⁵

An Unhappy Record

Neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample
them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Bible, *Matthew 7:6*

Clean from Nonentity we came,
and all unclean we did depart.
We entered with gladness in our heart,
and left in sorrow and in shame.

Omar Khayyam²⁶

Aurangzeb ascended the throne in 1658 and within a short period of time he got rid of Sarmad and destroyed almost all of his works. Yet somehow a few more than three hundred rubaiyat survived. Aurangzeb also subjected the friends of Dara and Sufi saints to summary trial and arbitrary punishment.

Sarmad was not the only saint whose blood besmeared the hands of Aurangzeb. Lal Bahadur, a Hindu saint who frequently visited the royal court, was similarly assassinated. Under Aurangzeb's order Guru Teg Bahadur, the ninth Guru in the line of Guru Nanak, was beheaded in the Chandni Chowk, Delhi's central thoroughfare. By condemning these saints to death, Aurangzeb trampled underfoot an important injunction of the Qur'an:

The Life of Sarmad

Let there be no compulsion in religion: The right way is distinct from error: whoever rejects false gods and believes in Allah has taken hold of the firmest grasp, a grasp that will never break. Allah hears and knows all.²⁷

According to the legend about the manner in which he met his death at the hands of the executioner, Sarmad proved to be a living example to the world that by following a particular path a devotee can see the Lord within and can become so completely one with Him as to declare "*Ana al-Haq*"—"I am God".

Speaking of the beauty of martyrdom, Turnbull says:

Fear not the crucifixion.

It puts the crown in the soul of Christ.

A soul is gold tied to the fire of tribulation,
to purify and shine brighter.

When Christ is reborn in you,

the soul is freed of the serpent of the flesh.²⁸

Even with the shadow of death cast over his head, Sarmad retained his sense of humour. It is recounted that he said that it was good that his head was going to be cut off, because he had been suffering from a headache for quite a long time:

Ah! How merciful is He that He ordered
my head to be severed from my body.

From a serious headache I was suffering –
He cut the matter short.²⁹

The Extreme of Humility

Sarmad died an ideal death. And, true to his name, he will live forever through his rubaiyat, a great legacy to humankind.

The Extreme of Humility

I could do no devotion – I was incapable,
nor did I have sufficient strength to undertake it.
Whatever was done was done by the Lord alone,
and that is how Kabir has become what he is.

Kabir³⁰

What is most useless? What is it? It is me.
The palm tree that bears no fruit is me.
I myself have pondered and calculated:
That mere speck of dust, of no account, is me.

Rubai 182

How could someone of such humility also proclaim “I am God”? Was it presumptuous on the part of Sarmad to have proclaimed “*Ana al-Haq*”? Sarmad knew that his end was approaching and he was aware of the way he would meet his death as well as the purpose it would serve:

A long time since the fame of Mansur
[has become] an ancient relic,
I will exhibit with my head, the gallow and cord
[that Sarmad died valiantly.]³¹

Mansur, as mentioned earlier, was martyred by the Caliph of Baghdad for repeatedly exclaiming “*Ana al-Haq*”. Sarmad provided a reminder by sacrificing his life in the interest

of truth. What is the explanation for this phenomenon? Jalaluddin Rumi, the great Sufi saint, says that far from being a presumptuous claim, it is born of extreme humility and complete forgetfulness of self. He explains:

People imagine that it is a presumptuous claim, whereas it is a presumptuous claim to say *Ana'l'abd* (I am the slave of God); and *Ana'l-Haq* (I am God) is an expression of great humility. The man who says "*Ana'l'abd*" (I am the slave of God) affirms two existences, his own and God's, but he who says "*Ana'l-Haq*" (I am God) has made himself non-existent and has given himself up and says "I am God", i.e. "I am naught, He is all: there is no being but God's." This is the extreme of humility and self-abasement.³²

Rumi then asserts:

No, no! 'Twas even He (God) that cried in human shape, "*Ana'l-Haq*"; the one who mounted the scaffold was not Mansur, as the foolish imagined. Rumi has not spoken and will not speak words of infidelity; do not disbelieve him!³³

Mystics of both East and West admit the truth of the claim that when the individual soul becomes one with the Supreme Soul its separate identity ceases to exist, and that whatever such a person does is done in the name of God. Such a relationship is expressed in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* thus:

As loving man and wife, when they embrace,
are both dissolved in but one sympathy of love,

The Extreme of Humility

one sentiment of unity, and know naught else
outside their body or inside their mind –
even more the soul when it embraces God,
and feels its Unity with the All-Self.³⁴

Western readers will be interested to know that Saint Teresa, in *The Interior Castle*, writes:

One might speak of the water from the sky, which falls into a river or a fountain and is so lost in it that we cannot any longer divide or distinguish which is the water of the river and which the drop from the sky. Or better, of a tiny brook which throws itself into the sea, and which is impossible to separate from thence.³⁵

And another Christian mystic, Saint John of the Cross, states:

Mine are the heavens and mine is the earth, mine are mankind and the just and the sinners; the angels are mine and the Mother of God (Virgin Mary), and all things are mine; and God himself is mine and for me; for Christ is mine and all for me. Truly then what seekest thou for, my soul, and what does thou ask for? All that is thine, and is all for thee.³⁶

In the religion of Love, there is no room for two. According to a mystic story, a certain man knocked at his Friend's door. His Friend asked, "Who is there?"

He answered, "I."

"Begone," said the Friend. The man came again after some years—after the fire of separation had matured him. "Who is there?" asked his Friend.

He answered, "Thou, O charmer of all hearts!"

"Now," said the Friend, "since thou art I, come in—there is no room for two 'I's' in this house."³⁷

Kabir, the great Indian mystic, expresses the same idea:

Narrow indeed is the path of true love,
for it can hold but one, not two.

When I was – ah! The Master was not,
but now the Master is, and I am not.³⁸

The Persian mystic Abu Yazid of Bastam, overwhelmed by divine love, shocked the orthodox Muslims by declaring: "Glory to me! How great is my majesty!" He said:

Once He [God] raised me up and stationed me before Him, and said to me, "O Abu Yazid, truly My creation, I desire to see thee". I said, "Adorn me in Thy Unity, and clothe me in Thy Selfhood, and raise me in Thy openness, so that when Thy creation sees me they will say, we have seen Thee: And Thou wilt be That, and I shall not be there at all."³⁹

And so one can go on quoting a hundred authorities to show that between the perfect saints and God there is no difference, and that they announce this not out of pride, but out of utter annihilation of self, out of extreme humility, and out of boundless love for those who seek the Lord.

On Some Points

The religion of love is apart from all religions.

The lovers of God have no religion but God alone.

Rumi⁴⁰

Some points regarding Sarmad's life require explanation. His rubaiyat make mention of him being Jewish, Muslim and Hindu, yet we can only speculate about the actual facts of his relationship to these religions. In truth, however, saints attach no importance to religious labels and do not convert from one religion to another. They refer to the holy books of the audiences they address in order to communicate with seekers about the spiritual path. In addressing Muslim audiences, Sarmad naturally used the Qur'an and other Islamic spiritual books, which were easily understood by his Muslim audiences.

Sarmad was also a student of the Gita, the Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and quite naturally he made use of these when addressing Hindu audiences. This perhaps led some Muslims to believe that he had become a Hindu. Actually, Hinduism at that time did not admit outsiders into its fold—one could leave it, but not enter into it as a convert.

Sarmad was given a Muslim burial. Even if he could have become a Hindu, why was he tried as a Muslim, and why would he not have been cremated in the Hindu tradition? Being a mystic, Sarmad would not have cared how people disposed of his body—saints attach no significance to such matters. The point need not be belaboured any further except to say that a number of Muslim mystics have utilized Hindu sacred books and Hindu legends to illustrate their teachings, and Hindu saints have used the Qur'an for the same purpose.

The Life of Sarmad

A spiritual teacher has to take into consideration the local culture and surroundings and use local stories, parables and legends to drive home his teachings. This does not mean preference for or conversion to any religion.

All this discussion of his religion and supposed conversions is trivial, finally, when compared with the transcendent teaching of Sarmad. Did Sarmad follow a path unknown to Judaism? Far from it. The Bible, the Talmud and other commentaries on the Bible emphasize that the path of love is the only path that leads to God. The formalism of religion does not have any value there at all. Sarmad taught and followed the path of love, and it is only love that counts in the court of the Lord:

If for a moment the Master gives you a grieving heart,
lasting peace on this earth He will also give.

If the seal of God's love
is impressed upon the ring of your heart,
you will have rulership of this creation.

Rubai 83

The heart ensnared in the web of his love
is happy and free of both the worlds.
I see the one face of Inner Reality everywhere.
The mirror that reflects this oneness
is given by God himself.

Rubai 93

The statement regarding the supremacy of love is illustrated by a legend regarding Moses:

Once Moses saw a shepherd crying, "O God, where are you, that I may become your servant and stitch your shoes and

comb your hair? That I may wash your clothes and kill your lice and bring you milk. That I may kiss your little hand and rub your little feet and sweep your little room at bedtime." On hearing this, Moses rebuked the youth, "Don't be so stupid," he said, "God does not use shoes, and he would be annoyed and angered at your stupid behaviour." The rebuke, coming from such a high personage, set the youth to wailing and weeping for the sin he had committed against God.

That night Moses had a vision of God, and God rebuked him, saying, "You are sent to bring souls nearer to Me, and not to thrust them aside."*

According to another legend, one day Moses was passing by the house of a lady who was childless.[†] The lady invited him in and asked him to meet God and beg him to give her the gift of a son. Moses approached God, who, however, told him that the lady was destined by His will to be childless.

Some time later, a saint passing by the house of that lady cried, "Anyone who gives me a loaf will get a child; one who gives me two loaves will have two children, and one who gives me five loaves will have five children."

The lady immediately rushed out and asked the saint to come in and be seated while she prepared fresh loaves. She came back with five loaves and handed them over to the saint. In course of time she received the gift of five children.

Some years later Moses happened to pass by the house and heard the noise of children. He went in to enquire, and the lady said that the children were the gift of a saint. Moses then rushed straight to God to ask him why he had rejected

* For the detailed story of Moses and the shepherd on the indulgence of God, see A.J. Arberry's *Tales from the Masnavi*, p.132-134.

† The source of this story could not be traced.

Moses's prayer and accepted that of the saint. Before Moses could ask the question, however, God told him to get a large piece of human flesh. Moses immediately hastened back to the town.

The saint, who was seated by the roadside, saw Moses rushing along and asked him what all the excitement was about.

"God wants a piece of human flesh," said Moses.

"Is that all?" replied the saint, and quickly cut a large piece of flesh from his thigh and handed it over to him. Moses went back happily since his mission was fulfilled, and asked God for a reply to his earlier question.

"You have already got the reply," said God. "You could have given your own flesh to me, but went out to find someone else to make the sacrifice. The saint did not hesitate to do so. How could I reject the prayer of such a devotee of mine?"

These are symbolical stories that are meant to illustrate the supremacy of love and the high position that great mystics like Sarmad occupy in the spiritual world. Maharaj Charan Singh, fourth in the line of Beas Masters, says that mystical legends are meant to drive home some profound spiritual teachings in a story form so that even simple people can grasp them without difficulty. They are not historical incidents and are never meant to be so represented. The stories may be forgotten or ignored, but the teachings they embody can be brushed aside only at one's misfortune.



Mysticism

A Unique Method of Devotion

Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or lesser degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.

Evelyn Underhill⁴¹

Sarmad was a mystic. But what is mysticism? A great deal of misunderstanding arising from ignorance, prejudices and superstitions prevails regarding this most perfect of all sciences. How does mysticism differ from other forms of worship? We shall state the position categorically: mysticism holds that though outward forms of worship, congregational prayers, recitation of devotional songs, reading of holy books, visits to shrines and holy places, and rites, rituals and ceremonies may have some value, they are useless for attaining salvation and achieving Godhood.

The search for God must be made within the body, which is described in the Bible as the temple of the living God.

Disciples of living true Masters conduct this search by practising concentration at the centre of consciousness between the two eyebrows and slightly above the root of the nose. This centre is the seat of the mind, the soul and the Word or Holy Spirit. In Patanjali's *Yogasutra* it is said: "Concentration is the confinement of the mind in a fixed place. Meditation is the continuation of the cognition therein."⁴² From this centre the mind, with power derived from the Word, operates throughout the body.

Mystics say that the human body is a miracle of divine creation. It is such a miracle that, through it, one can find the entire creation and the vast inner regions*—the higher the region, the more vast its size, the greater its splendour, the more joyous its bliss. Through the spiritual practices as given by true Masters a disciple passes from lower to higher regions while still in this body and can, if he wants, find the truth regarding past prophets and saints, gods and goddesses and paradises, heavens and hells for himself, and verify by personal knowledge the facts and fictions regarding them.

Mystics, who see everything with inner vision, say that the gods and goddesses of ancient Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome and India are no more than 'officers' appointed by the Supreme Creator to carry out certain fixed duties, and that these gods and goddesses hold office for certain periods, after which others are appointed. The gods and goddesses are not free from birth and death, and have not seen the Creator. They have been appointed to these offices by reason of their penances and devotion. However, they have to take human

* inner regions: the regions or spheres of consciousness that the soul crosses or experiences on its journey to God-realization.

birth to find true salvation. It is only in the human form that it is possible, through the worship of the Lord, to achieve God-realization.

The true Master and his disciples have the passport which is needed to journey through the higher inner regions:

There without oil or thread
burns the fiery lamp, unwavering and everlasting.
Let us see Him who is formless,
but not with these eyes.
Let us drink in the intoxicating joy of this vision,
but not with this tongue.
The saints alone can catch Him
in the web of their love.⁴³

What avails it if one
has bathed in holy waters and offers worship?
What avails it to sit in the house
and give money in charity?
What use is it to have studied all the six philosophies
and to have preserved caste distinctions?
These are but tricks to gain a living.
Narsi says: Who knows not the Supreme Lord
that dwells within him,
who sees not the spirit in all things,
he has wasted his life,
precious as the *chintaamani** jewel.

Narsi Mehta⁴⁴

* *chintaamani*: a mythical jewel which was thought to grant its possessor all his desires, thereby removing his worries, pains and anxieties.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, second in the line of Beas Masters, says:

The objective of *simran** [meditative practice] is to enable us to meet the Lord. Once *simran* is perfected, the soul experiences Him within—a task that is impossible for the mind and the senses. As long as the soul permeates the body and is absorbed in external objects, it is unable to meet Him.⁴⁵

The Word or Holy Spirit is the prime manifestation of the Supreme Creator. Its power has created and sustains the entire universe. It sustains the soul, the mind and the body, and its permanent withdrawal results in instant death. While supplying power for all action, and the birth and growth of every living creature, the Word itself remains unconsumed, aloof and ever unchanged.

The Word can be seen by the soul as light of a kind incomparable. Its sound reverberates throughout the universe, as well as in the human body. It constitutes a most fascinating music. The fascination of the light and the sound of the Word is so great that on seeing and hearing it a disciple automatically begins to be freed from the passions of lust, anger, greed, attachment and egotism.

On hearing the Sound and seeing the light within, the mind, which has been in search of happiness and peace through the ages, and which constantly gets frustrated in trying to discover these in things material, finds at last real and lasting happiness.

* *simran*: the practice of repetition of holy names in meditation to achieve concentration at the eye centre and the withdrawal of the soul currents from the body.

The mind from that time onwards, instead of being attached to things material, becomes absorbed in things spiritual. Its downward journey ends and its upward journey begins.

Only a perfect and living Master has the key to the secret of the Word. After initiation by such a Master, and the practice of meditation, one eventually can hear the inner Sound throughout all the twenty-four hours. Even the physically deaf can hear it. After some progress the devotee begins to see the light—even the blind can see it. The Sound is heard and the light is seen by the soul, and not by physical ears and eyes.

Past Masters can no more initiate a person and guide him from one inner region to another than past doctors can cure a patient, or past engineers build roads and bridges. The Master must be present here in physical form for the disciple's initiation and as a focus for his devotion.

The descriptions of the inner spiritual realms through which one passes on the upward journey are not a product of imagination, hallucination or mental derangement. In reality, mystics do not reveal even the millionth part of what they see in the spiritual world. Various Masters have written volumes of literature on this subject, and if we cannot understand them the deficiency is ours. They have explained the spiritual science of salvation in the simplest and clearest manner possible.

Living saints who are one with God come to this earth with the single object of taking back to the Creator the souls that are ready to return. In doing so they undergo wearisome toil, indescribable hardships, infamy, ignominy and even martyrdom at the hands of those whom they come to rescue. They stand to gain nothing worldly from all this.

Sarmad was a mystic and the core of his teaching is the search for God within one's own body:

If you learn to float you will find that your heart
is an ocean surrounding the seven regions.

Dive and discover that all creation
exists within the ocean of your existence.

You may then become a storm, or an anchor.

Rubai 299

Dr S. Radhakrishnan puts his finger on the spot when he
says:

To say that God exists means that spiritual experience is
attainable. The possibility of the experience constitutes
the most conclusive proof of the reality of God....

The authority of scripture, the traditions of the Church,
or the causistry of schoolmen who proclaim but do not
prove, may not carry conviction to many of us who are
children of science and reason, but we must submit to the
fact of spiritual experience, which is primary and positive.
We may dispute theologies, but cannot deny facts.⁴⁶

He further says:

The Hindu ideal affirms that man can attain his immor-
tal destiny here and now. The kingdom of God is within
us, and we need not wait for its attainment till some
undated future or look for an apocalyptic display in the
sky. It is true that the deepest secret of spiritual life is
hidden from the common view and can be attained only
with an effort. This effort is a lonely one, a flight of the
alone to the alone.⁴⁷

Cranks, Crooks and Clowns

Jan van Ruysbroeck says in *The Ring*:

If we desire to taste God in our own selves we must pass beyond reason.... We must remain despoiled and free of all images.... We go on to a state of ignorance and darkness to suffer the higher information of the Eternal Word, the image of the Father.⁴⁸

Maharaj Sawan Singh asserts, finally, that "Liberation is no imaginary ideal. This state is automatically attained on getting the treasure of Love and through the practice of Nam (the Word)."⁴⁹ All true Masters have taught the mystic practice that leads to this treasure of divine love and liberation of the soul. Tulsi Sahib writes:

Listen, O Taqi, keep your gaze fixed on your Master,
who has offered you his hand.

Leave it not through negligence if you want
to see the splendour of your Beloved....

Go straight to your destination,
for the Master has given you his charter.

Mansur, Sarmad, Bu Ali, Shams and Maulana came:

With strong resolve they reached their goal
through this very path.⁵⁰

Cranks, Crooks and Clowns

If there were no genuine coins in the world,
how would it be possible to mint false coins?

Amongst the wearers of the dervish-cloak
there is one true dervish:*

Search well, and accept Him that is true.

Rumi⁵¹

He who gives you Ram [Nam],
the Name or Word of God, is the Master.

Others are wolves that devour your wealth

but cannot save you from the sins which cause rebirth.

Akho⁵²

Everything precious has its imitation. Counterfeiting is an age-old industry. Imitation gold and false precious stones have a worldwide market. Violation of trademarks is an art today. No wonder that mysticism has its counterfeiters, fakers, humbugs and pretenders.

In India we have over a million so-called sadhus and faqirs, wandering about among the towns and villages, haunting temples and mosques, pilgrim centres and holy rivers—men who sport fantastic clothes and the skins of wild animals and snakes. Some of them decorate themselves with weird sea shells, peacock feathers and horns of animals—and carry swords, spears and daggers.

Among them are also palmists, astrologers and phrenologists, and those who assure jobs and success in school examinations and love affairs—for a financial consideration. Others supply charms and amulets for winning court cases, and promise prosperity in business activities; some settle family disputes,

* dervish: a mystic of the Sufi tradition who has taken vows of poverty and austerity.

also for a consideration. People even mistake true Masters for such peddlers of earthly wealth. Sarmad writes:

This strange sight have I seen:
Everyone begs God for riches and salvation,
or asks for a silver-skinned, moon-faced beauty.
But my desolate heart seeks neither this nor that,
it is yearning for union with Him – nothing else.

Rubai 123

There are sadhus who go about singing devotional songs and narrating tales from sacred books, and who pretend to be pious people. Some, at a slightly higher level, expose themselves to heat and cold, live in caves, sleep on a bed of nails or stand on one leg—before the admiring gaze of their spectators. Still others resort to yogic exercises, which may bring some spiritual power, in order to work miracles. We have quite a few Stylites* in India.

True mystics have exposed these humbugs in unmeasured terms. Samarth Ramdas was a Maharashtrian saint who lived in the seventeenth century and Chhatrapati Shivaji, founder of the Maratha Empire, was a disciple of his. Samarth Ramdas wrote:

There are millions of gurus
who give you mantras and indulge in witchcraft
and other practices.
Their minds are full of passion.
They are useless to you;
they are not givers of salvation.⁵³

* Stylite: an ascetic living on the top of a pillar, especially in ancient or medieval Syria, Turkey and Greece.

The practitioner of witchcraft, the deceiver,
the grabber of money, the slanderer, the jealous,
the one devoid of devotion, the egotist,
the addict of passion – don't keep their company.
Only he is the transcendent Master,
who has attained God-realization.⁵⁴

Tukaram, another Maharashtrian saint, condemns the
so-called saints who receive food or money for their services,
and even food for their animals:

Miracle-mongering is no test of spirituality.
Tuka says: I am weary of these fellows,
who can tell your future, past and present –
I don't want to see their faces.
Those who run after miraculous powers
and try to make reality square with their words –
They will go to hell after their merit is thus squandered.

God keeps away from the person
who trades in miracle-mongering.
Bad indeed is worldly pursuit,
but worse is the pursuit of miraculous powers.
Sainthood cannot be purchased by wealth,
nor can it be found in the upper and nether worlds.

Sainthood can be acquired only at the cost of one's life.
Tuka says: He who is not prepared to sacrifice his life
should stop bragging
about being on the spiritual path.⁵⁵

Some so-called sadhus shave their heads, beards and moustaches. Regarding them, Kabir says:

You have shaved your head,
beard and moustaches, clear and smooth,
but have not shaved your mind,
in which has accumulated abominable filth.
If by shaving one could get God,
everyone would shave.
Sheep are shorn frequently,
but not one has yet gone to heaven.⁵⁶

You have put on a lion skin
but walk in the style of a lamb.
You talk the language of a hyena or rhinoceros
but the dog Satan will tear you to pieces
and make a meal of you.⁵⁷

In reply to those who have achieved some spiritual power and use it by showing the public that they can stay alive underwater, fly in the air or lie underground for many hours, mystics point out that even fish live underwater, thousands of birds fly in the air, and innumerable worms lie underground—yet they do not get salvation.

Oftentimes, disciples will recount 'miracle stories' in an attempt to express their great affection and awe for a true Master, and these legends will be passed down lovingly from generation to generation. But these stories are simply illustrations of the vast love and power of the Master, and they are not meant to be taken literally.

The teachings of genuine mystics are misunderstood and misrepresented after they have passed away, and practices are instituted in their names which are sometimes bizarre, sometimes amusing, always useless and often dangerous and harmful.

Intellectuals and Mrs Grundy

Mysticism is a word ill-favoured by the rationalist as well as the dogmatic theologian. It is criticised as a tendency to see things cloudily, in a golden or sentimental haze, to justify the habit of the human mind to entertain contradictory beliefs at the same time, to exalt confusion of thought. Mysticism is none of these things....It is not a flight to unreason or a glorification of ignorance and obscurity.

S. Radhakrishnan⁵⁸

Many rationalists imagine that mystic experiences are mere hallucination, the working of a perverted imagination, or an emotional outburst. Actually, mystical experience is far more real than any experience in the material world. Prof. E. Allison Peers says:

Mysticism, far from being the vague ethereal thing of popular belief, is the most exact science in existence. Its goal is as clearly envisaged as are the means which must be employed in order to reach it.⁵⁹

Unfortunately, there are rationalists who are so irrational that they are guided by prejudice, and there are intellectuals who will not apply their intellect to the subject of mysticism.

And the prejudice is so amusing that the moment they hear such words as Word, Nam, Guru, astral body, higher regions, seventh heaven, Sat Lok, True Region or dying while living they begin to deride the subject. They imagine that the powers of God Almighty can be apprehended by their own limited intellectual capacity. They are like Charles Dickens's character, Mrs Grundy, who brushes aside everything she does not understand.

Masters explain that rationalists should first conduct experiments in their own laboratory—the body—and then come to conclusions and pass judgement. The mere novelty of an idea should not force them at once to shy away from the subject.

If a villager in some obscure corner of India who had never been in touch with modern civilization were told of trains running at sixty miles an hour and without bullocks or horses to draw them, of aeroplanes that fly 600 miles per hour and of atom bombs that destroy an entire city, he would consider it to be the product of fantastic imagination, and downright nonsense. If he were told that speeches delivered at a distance of 10,000 miles could be heard through a radio in his village, or that telegrams could be sent from one place to another, or that one could talk on a telephone from a distance of 10,000 miles or hear a song recorded on a gramophone record, he would consider it to be utterly untrue.

Many a rationalist and material scientist is no more qualified to give his opinion on mysticism than a villager is qualified to brush aside modern scientific inventions as eccentric nonsense. Both are ignorant and neither has the right to pass judgement on a subject which he has not studied. It is their duty to study the subject. So Sarmad admonishes us not to be neglectful:

Alas, you are unaware of your own condition!

You are your own enemy,

not your own best well-wisher.

Lack of awareness and drunken negligence

bring a hangover – be warned,

for you won't be there for the Wine at dawn.*

Rubai 292

When the chemical scientist gives the full scientific name for DDT, the well-known insecticide, as dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane, to disclose its many components, no student of science gets frightened at that unique name, nor does he straight off deny that such a simple looking insecticide could be such a complex chemical compound. But when a Master explains that the human body is composed of the material body, the astral body, the causal body, the mind and the soul, and that within it is the entire creation—and that God himself resides in it—the intellectual dismisses it all as absurd. If a student of chemistry were to doubt what his professor told him, he would go to the laboratory and prove everything for himself. Similarly, the Master says: My dear brother, I shall show you how to conduct the research, and you will find everything I have mentioned within your body. But the intellectual has no time for such research. He has more important work to do!

The Way of a Pilgrim poses a question:

We think, "I would very gladly take an interest in spiritual things, and in prayer, but I have no time. The fuss and cares of life give no chance for such a thing." Yet

* Wine: the bliss of his love; the Name or the Word.

which is really important and necessary—salvation and the eternal life of the soul, or the fleeting life of the body on which we spend so much labour?⁶⁰

Let us turn from research to faith. How many vital activities of ours are dependent on faith? A little child has complete faith in its mother. Almost the entire machinery of modern civilization works on faith. When we drop a letter in a post-box, we do it with complete faith that it will be delivered to the addressee. That faith enables us to send money orders, deal in bank business, accept currency notes, deal on the stock exchange, travel by train, steamer and plane. These simple activities would be impossible without faith; why then the lack of faith in a matter of the highest importance?

Maharaj Jagat Singh, third in the line of Beas Masters, describes the Word as life-giving nectar that can be comprehended only by the soul and which kills all passions. He further says:

One may doubt how sound can create and maintain the universe. This is not the subject of intellect or reasoning. Reasoning takes us only to a certain point. Beyond that we have to take the help of *anubhav* [experience], and till we have developed that mental insight, the power of comprehension without reasoning, we have to depend upon the intuition and inner experience of those who have gone within and have seen with their own eyes. In the meantime faith must replace reason.⁶¹

Sarmad may have had rationalists and intellectuals—those to whom faith does not come easily—in mind when he wrote:

The madness of my heart is the perfection of wisdom,
but the chaos of love
is beyond the grasp of the mind:
Can the ocean be contained in a pitcher?
Impossible, it says, even though some may claim it.

Rubai 166

Sir Charles Eliot, in his *Hinduism and Buddhism*, says about spiritual experience: "It has been confirmed by the experience of men whose writings testify to their intellectual power and who have commanded the respect of the masses. It must command our respect too, even if it is contrary to our temperament; for...it cannot be explained away as hallucination or charlatanism."⁶²

Dean Inge writes in *Freedom, Love and Truth*:

Mysticism is singularly uniform in all times and places. The communication of the soul with God has found much the same expression, whether the mystic is a neo-platonic philosopher like Plotinus, a Mohammedan Sufi, a Catholic monk or a Quaker.

Mysticism, which is the living heart of religion, springs from a deeper level than the differences which divide the churches, or the cultural changes which divide the ages of history.⁶³

The Path of the Hero

The path of God is for the brave;
the coward knows it not.

The Path of the Hero

He who is prepared to offer his head first –
he alone is fit to utter his Name.

Only he enjoys eternal bliss
who dedicates his all to Him.

Pritamdas⁶⁴

Sarmad was a hero. This needs to be stated, because many imagine that those who abandon the pursuit of wealth and honour are running away from the world, or do not have the courage to face the world. This was not so with Sarmad. He had a prosperous business, and even perhaps came to India to make an on-the-spot study of the market with a view to expand his business.

To then abandon all that, to throw away all the wealth and position and honour that it brought, to pass his life deprived of all the comfort to which he was accustomed, to be dressed in rags or not dressed at all, to eat and live on any food available, and to invite ridicule and contempt instead of joining in happy, easygoing conversation—all for the sake of the search for God—was this cowardice or heroism? And when did he run away from the world? He lived in Delhi, the capital of India, the hub of all important activities, and he was always surrounded by crowds.

Is it cowardice to check one's anger instead of giving vent to it, to curb one's passions instead of allowing them full latitude, to crush one's ego instead of giving it full play? Does it require greater courage to follow one's natural weaknesses or to put a stopper on them? Does it require stronger willpower to abandon old ties, friends and relatives, and to face their hostility than to continue along the easy-going track? One has only to pose the questions to get the reply. Surely it requires

tougher fibre to pursue the path towards divinity in the midst of persecution, calumny, shame and dishonour. Sarmad, like other saints, stresses that only heroes are fit to gain access to the spiritual path and travel on it:

Unless you become nothing,
you will not be shown the road to Being.
One who is weak of will is not granted this status —
Unless you set out to burn like a candle
you will not be shown the Light.

Rubai 126

O Sarmad, the pangs of love
are not granted to the fickle hearted,
the burning heart of the moth is not granted to the fly.
A lifetime is needed to woo the Beloved.
O Sarmad, very few are granted this eternal wealth.

Rubai 88

The disciples of mystics are heroes and heroines because they master their body and mind, reduce their wants—which also requires courage—and give up worldly power to engage themselves in the more fierce battle, the struggle against their lower selves:

Before you can surrender yourself, you must be master of yourself, or how else can you surrender? You can make a gift only of what is your own and not what is claimed by others.

Maharaj Charan Singh⁶⁵

To those who imagine that it is a path followed for lack of courage, Maharaj Jagat Singh, who was a hero if ever there was one, gives a fitting reply:

Cowards never conquer. Sant Mat is the path of the valiant. They come into the field of battle with their 'head on their palms', as an offering to the Beloved Lord. No sacrifice is too great to win the Fort (the palace of the Beloved).⁶⁶

None was more competent to speak of the heroism of mystics than Mira Bai, the Queen of Chittor, who was herself heroism personified when climbing the spiritual path:

The brave never turn their back on the battlefield;

it matters not if the sacrifice of life

is the price to be paid.

The lovers likewise care not

if scoffers torment or speak evil of them.

The decision must be made

to sacrifice every bit of the body –

and of life itself – at the altar of Love.⁶⁷

Kabir demands the highest heroism from pilgrims on the higher path:

A hero indeed is he, and worthy of praise,

who cuts off his head with his own hands,

destroys his ego and surrenders all thought of self.

How greatly, oh how greatly is the Master pleased

when he sees his servant approach.⁶⁸

A Danger Signal

One makes [spiritual] progress according to the capacity and knowledge of one's Guru. But we find numerous gurus at every step. In fact, there are more so-called 'gurus' in this world than there are disciples....All the saints and scriptures lay great stress upon finding a perfect Guru....Otherwise there is the danger of the blind leading the blind and reaching nowhere.

Maharaj Jagat Singh⁶⁹

Finally, we come to the distinction between two kinds of saints who follow the mystic method of devotion. The difference between the two is fundamental. True Masters are those who carry their disciples beyond the regions of mind and matter into the pure spiritual regions where one is freed from the wheel of birth and death. Other masters can only carry their disciples to the intermediate spiritual regions which they themselves have attained. Mystics say that these masters and their disciples may live in the inner regions for a while—perhaps for several thousand years—in surroundings far happier than here. But after this period is over, they are again brought down into the wheel of transmigration. They never see God face to face. Perfect Masters, on the other hand, take their disciples back to their divine Father and Creator. And the prodigal son is given a right royal welcome. Thus, under a living true Master, the disciple's journey is completed.

An important factor responsible for creating much misunderstanding regarding mystics is that they constitute a 'class' quite apart from the rest of the human beings in the world. They are people who, after moving about in the 'foreign lands'

of creation for unknown ages, seek an escape. Some seek to go back to their spiritual home—they are driven by the urge of their soul. Other people may seek to go back to the home of their mind (Brahm Lok). These people are driven by the urge of their mind and never reach the pure spiritual regions.

In *The Book of Mirdad*, Mikhail Naimy describes the first group as people affected by the Great Nostalgia, and the second as people affected by the Small Nostalgia. The people of the Small Nostalgia are victims of the powers that want to keep them away from God-realization. They are led to half-way houses, and that is a grave danger. Naimy explains in his inimitable style:

A sleepwalker is the man with the Great Nostalgia amid a world apparently so wide awake....

He meets on the way with men and women labouring up the mountain along a broad and smooth roadbed. They are the men and women of the Small Nostalgia who crave to reach the summit, but with a lame and sightless guide....

Much like an eagle hatched by a backyard hen...is the man with the Great Nostalgia among his fellow-men. His brother-chicks and mother-hen would have the young eagle as one of them, possessed of their nature and habits, and living as they live....But the call of the summits is loud in his blood, and the stench of the coop exasperating to his nose. Yet does he suffer it all in silence till he is fully fledged. And then he mounts the air, and casts a loving farewell look upon his erstwhile brothers and their mother who merrily cackle on as they dig in the earth for more seed and worms....

Understanding shall guide your steps to the unutterable freedom of the Summit, which is the true, the boundless, the all-including home of God and the Overcoming Man....

To stand but for a moment on that summit is worth enduring every kind of pain. But to abide forever on that summit is worth Eternity.⁷⁰

The similarity of language used by the saints and philosophers of all climes and times is very striking. While Mikhail Naimy compares a disciple to an eagle hatched by a backyard hen, who returns to the life of an eagle, a Jewish mystic uses a similar simile. Legend has it that soon after marriage this mystic began spending long hours in solitude and devotion. His father-in-law was greatly annoyed at this behaviour and rebuked him. At this, he replied: "The hen that hatches a water-duck's egg stands frightened on the bank when it sees its chick swimming in a lake and cackles to call it back. Little does it know that the chick is going to spend all its life on the lake, which is its natural abode."⁷¹

Nearly five thousand miles away from Central Europe, on the banks of the River Beas in India, the words of another spiritual tradition offer a similar comparison:

In books on Sant Mat it is often said that the cuckoo is in the habit of placing her eggs in the nest of a crow, and when the young ones come out she calls them and they fly back to their mother. Similarly, the individuals belonging to Saints, no matter to what family, creed or religion they may belong, start following the Saints when they listen to their satsang.⁷²

A Danger Signal

When the call comes, the Master's chicks come flying to him from thousands of miles away—even from around the world.

The language of seers, sages, yogis and other masters who may be at 'halfway houses' along the path to the highest spiritual region is often similar to that of true Masters who have achieved the destination, and quotations have been used in this book from all these teachers. The similarity of language arises from the fact that all spiritual teachers advocate the inward journey as the only method of going to the higher regions. All of them condemn the five passions because these retard one's progress to the inner regions. Their classification of the inner regions is also similar because all regions below the highest are reflections of the highest. But a reflection is not the reality—it is an illusion. Seekers, therefore, must be very careful to make sure that they are not misled by the similarity of language, teachings and descriptions of the higher regions. They must discriminate whether or not the Master can initiate them into the secret and power of the five holy Names.

When the cell comes the Master, this is a call to him from thousands of other ways — even from around the world.

The language of the Master, says and other matters who may be at 'halfway house' along the path to the highest spiritual region is often similar to that of the Master who have achieved the destination and questions have been raised in this book from all these teachers. The similarity of language arises from the fact that all spiritual teachers advocate the inward journey — the only method of going to the highest region. All of them condemn the five physical bodies which stand close to the inner region. Their descriptions of the inner region is also similar because all regions below the highest are reflections of the highest. But a reflection is not the reality — it is an illusion. So, the description must be very different to make sure that they are not misled by the similarity of language, descriptions and descriptions of the higher regions. They make distinction between what is of the Master and what is of the Master and power of the five bodies.

It is all on the basis of the Master and power of the five bodies.

It is all on the basis of the Master and power of the five bodies.

It is all on the basis of the Master and power of the five bodies.



The Word

In the Bible

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.

Bible, *John* 1:1-3

The devotee of a true Master concentrates on the worship of the Word and the Master, who is "the Word made flesh".⁷³ It is the Word that cleanses the mind and lifts up the soul until it reaches the Lord. But what is the Word?

The Word is the first emanation of God, revealed in the form of sound and light. It is the power that creates and sustains the entire creation. It is the life of every living creature. It is known as the Glory of the Lord, the Water of Life, Wisdom, Understanding, Commandment, Truth, Righteousness, Milk and the Cup of Salvation in the Old Testament; as Word, Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost and Bread of Life in the New Testament;

as Nam (the name), Ram Nam (God's name), Akashvani (the voice from the skies), Nad (sound) and Ram Dhun (God's inner music) in Hindu scriptures; as Shabd (word), Sar Shabd (real word), Sach (truth), Sat Shabd (true word), Anahad Shabd (limitless sound), Bani (word), Gurbani (Guru's word), Hukum (command), Akath Katha (unutterable lore) and Amrutbani (nectar word) in the Adi Granth; as Kalma (the word), Ism-i Azam (the greatest name), Kalam-i Ilahi (the voice of God), Nida-i Asmani (the heavenly voice) and Nada-i Sultani (the imperial sound) in Islamic literature; as Tao (the word or way) in Confucianism; as the Logos (word) among ancient Greeks; and as Sraosh in Zoroastrianism.

The Word is eternal, unchangeable, indestructible. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not the Name of the Lord. It is a power that is pure consciousness. Unlike material powers such as electricity, magnetism, steam, fire and atomic energy, which are consumed by us and transformed, the power of the Word is unconsumed and remains forever pure and unchanged.

All human beings are enlivened with the flow of the Word for the duration of their lifetime, and it may be spent for any purpose they choose. The Word can serve, through the grace of a living saint, to take the soul back to its home. It can also be spent in orgies of dissipation; fits of anger; satisfaction of greed, attachment and egoism; and in securing wealth, honour, position and power. These uses bring only pain and suffering, or at the most transitory happiness.

Sarmad makes several references in his rubaiyat to the importance of devotion to the Word for travelling the higher path. He calls it the Wine:

In the Bible

Wise are those who drink deep of this Wine,
leaving the sorrows and heartaches of life.
Drink Wine, for the great hunter Death
is on his rounds and no one escapes his net.

Rubai 110

Those who forsake this Wine are fools,
they are beasts and not human beings.
This Wine awakens the pain of longing,
it rekindles the flame
lying dormant in every heart.

Rubai 34

The Old Testament is full of references to the Word and the Name, for example:

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Bible, *Psalms* 119:105

Thy word is true from the beginning.

Bible, *Psalms* 119:160

Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.

Bible, *Psalms* 119:140

The name of the Lord is a strong power: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

Bible, *Proverbs* 18:10

The Word

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater:

So shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Bible, *Isaiah* 55:10,11

The New Testament explains that God and the Word are identical, and that it was God in his prime manifestation as the Word that created the creation, as stated in Saint John's Gospel.

Jesus Christ makes it clear that none can enter the Kingdom of Heaven without being initiated or baptized into the Word or the Holy Spirit. The Bible, as well as the Hindu scriptures, describes this as 'being born again'. This is the moment when the downward journey ends and the upward, inner journey begins:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.

Bible, *John* 3:5, 6

Worship of the Word, says Christ, detaches the devotee from the wheel of birth and death:

In the Bible

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Bible, *John* 5:24

Christ describes the Word as the bread of life, and a living true Master is this 'living bread' embodied:

I am that bread of life.... This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread, which came down from heaven: if any man eat this bread, he shall live for ever:

Bible, *John* 6:48, 50, 51

When Christ spoke of eating "the flesh of the Son of Man", by no stretch of the imagination could he have meant the physical flesh. Nor did he refer to the loaves of bread and the wine served in churches today as his flesh and blood. These are mere material things and have no spiritual value. Christ was "the Word made flesh", and he asked his disciples to feed their souls on that inner Word.

Devotion to the Word, says Christ, leads to real and lasting freedom:

If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Bible, *John* 8:31, 32

The New Testament emphasizes that those who have not been initiated into the worship of the Word are not able to

attain salvation. Those initiated by a living saint, however, will sooner or later be able to hear the Word and see its light within themselves, a light the like of which is not to be seen anywhere in the material world. Even the deaf can hear the sound, and the blind can see the light, while without the Word everyone is deaf and blind:

But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

Bible, *Matthew* 13:16, 17

When Jesus Christ told his disciples that they were fortunate in that their eyes and ears were opened, he was of course referring to the spiritual eyes and ears with which a disciple can see the light and hear the sound of the Word.

Sarmad also speaks of the rarity of this gift:

The mystery of the Cup and the Wine
is not revealed to all,
the secret can't be entrusted
to those whose hearts are cold.

O pretentious ascetic, I swear to God
you know nothing of God.

This mystery remains sealed
for the dense and the dull.

Rubai 53

Very fortunate, indeed, are those initiated into this path; it is a privilege denied to many. It is the only power that purifies the mind:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Bible, *II Corinthians* 5:17

Those who desire to make a more detailed study of mysticism in the New Testament cannot do better than to peruse Joseph Leeming's study, *Yoga and the Bible*. A similar work on the Old Testament would be of special interest from the Jewish perspective.*

The chief representatives of Alexandrian Christianity, Clement and Origen, adhered strictly to the teaching of the Logos or Word. They said that God is of incalculable value, and no words can describe Him, but we use words to 'lean on'. We cannot reach God except through the Logos. The Logos is the rational law of life. Clement said in his *Stromata*, "That man with whom the Logos dwells...is made like God...that man becomes God. The Word of God became Man in order that you also may learn from Man, how man becomes God."⁷⁴

The Philokalia, which means 'the love of spiritual beauty', is the title of a great and voluminous collection of mystical and ascetic writings by fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church, collected over a period of eleven centuries. On the subject of the Name or the Word, it says:

* See Miriam Bokser Caravella's *The Holy Name*, published by Radha Soami Satsang Beas.

The Word

One must learn to call upon the Name of God, more even than breathing, at all times, in all places, in every kind of occupation.

*The Philokalia*⁷⁵

But few people have the inclination to do so. Evelyn Underhill says:

Many people suggest by their behaviour that God is of far less importance than their bath, morning paper, or early cup of tea. The life of cooperation with Him must begin with a full and practical acceptance of the truth that God alone matters—and that He, the Perfect, always desires perfection.⁷⁶

The Way of a Pilgrim also expresses the importance of the Word:

Maxim the Confessor understands by 'daily bread' the feeding of the soul with heavenly bread that is the Word of God and the Union of the soul with God.⁷⁷

Ceaseless prayer is to call upon the Name of God always, whether a man is conversing, or sitting down or walking or making some thing or eating; whatever he may be doing, in all places, and at all times, he ought to call upon God's Name.⁷⁸

The Word in Indian and Persian Literature

Shabd created the earth,
Shabd created the sky,

The Word in Indian and Persian Literature

Through Shabd emanated light.
The entire world is sustained by Shabd;
Shabd, O Nanak, dwells in every being.

Guru Nanak⁷⁹

Indian and Persian saints echo the Bible in declaring that the creation was formed through the power of the Word:

It is the Shabd [the Word]
that has created the whole universe.

Soami Ji Maharaj⁸⁰

Through the Word, the world came into being.

Shah Niaz⁸¹

The saints also unanimously proclaim that the Word is the only power that can cleanse the mind and the soul and take them both to their original homes. They declare that those who neglect their duty in this respect invite disaster on themselves. No religious book is more explicit on the power of the Word than the *Adi Granth*:

The creation and deluge occur through the Lord's Word.
Through the Word the creation evolves again.

Guru Amardas^{82*}

Having renounced other hopes,
we ought to meditate on the Name alone....

* Direct English quotations from the *Adi Granth* are taken verbatim from the Manmohan Singh translation, referred to as *Adi Granth*, MMS in the Endnotes.

Without the Name peace ensues not,
without the Beloved grief does not depart.

Guru Nanak⁸³

Without the Name,
man is knocked about [in transmigration].
The love of duality has drowned multitudes of men.
O my soul! thou shalt swim across the world ocean
by fixing attention on God's Name.
Those who through the Guru
have not understood God's Name
are reborn after death
and continue coming and going.

Guru Nanak⁸⁴

Dariya Sahib echoes this when he says:

From Shabd have emanated the earth
and the heaven....
Shabd has created the entire world.
It is Shabd which holds together
the entire expanse of the universe...
and it is with Shabd that a wise one builds
a bridge over the ocean of the world.
None can go to the other shore without the Shabd.⁸⁵

The cobbler saint Ravidas says:

In the Golden Age, Truth reigned Supreme,
in the Silver Age, sacrifice,
in the Copper Age, worship and piety.

The Word in Indian and Persian Literature

In the three Ages men held fast to these acts.

But in the Iron Age, our mainstay is the Name.⁸⁶

Baba Jaimal Singh declares that everything is unreal except the Name of the Lord:

As the body itself is unreal, everything else in the world is unreal too. Nam-dhun alone is real, so hold fast to it.⁸⁷

You mark your presence in the court of the Lord when you listen to the Shabd-dhun every day.⁸⁸

God is Love, it is said, and people wonder what this means. Maharaj Sawan Singh says that the Word is love divine, and it is this love that sustains us: "God is Nam and Shabd. God is love. Therefore, Nam and Shabd are also love."⁸⁹ Maharaj Charan Singh concludes, "Love for the inner Sound embraces all love."⁹⁰

Tukaram, Samarth Ramdas, Eknath, Chokha Mela and Waman Pandit were saints of Maharashtra, India, during the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries. Tukaram left some thousands of devotional songs, which are sung by devotees to this day. Tukaram said that all—the rich and the poor, the high and the low, of whatever religion or country and however sinful—can get salvation only through Nam, the Word:

Tuka declares: blessed is he who repeats the Name,
whether he belongs to a good family
or a high caste or is low-born.⁹¹

The Word

I most humbly pray to saints,
spiritual leaders, seers and sages,
to find a single person who has wasted his efforts
by devotion to Nam.⁹²

Chokha Mela, an 'untouchable', belonged to the lowest caste in India and lived a life of devotion which has few parallels. He said that by worship of the Word he trampled death under his feet:

I bear testimony to the fact
that by devotion to the Word
in this body I met the Lord face to face.
Such is the efficacy of the Name
that I tread death underneath my feet by its grace.⁹³

The Muslim mystic Bulleh Shah belittles worldly knowledge and eulogizes the Word:

We are powerless in the fortress of learning;
this learning has made us prisoners of the pen.
We are all worthless without the Word,
and without the Word we cannot cross.⁹⁴

The Qur'an, the sacred scripture of the Muslim religion, refers to this same Word as the *Kun* (literally, 'Be! Exist!'):

His Command, when He intends a thing, is only that he says Be! and it is.⁹⁵

The Word in Zoroastrianism

Jalaluddin Rumi, the great Persian mystic and poet, says that there is no other way to realize the Lord: "How will you be freed of selfish desires without the wine of his Name?"⁹⁶ He further expresses:

Your Name is upon my tongue,
your image is in my sight,
your memory is in my heart –
Whither then shall I write?⁹⁷

He also states:

His Name is the spirit of spirits,
his invocation the ruby of mines.
His love is in the soul,
he is both our refuge and hope.⁹⁸

Niaz, another Sufi saint, says:

All the world is filled with the divine Sound; you must only open your inner ears to hear it. To open these ears you must close your ears to worldly noises. Then you will hear the unceasing sound, which has neither beginning nor end.⁹⁹

The Word in Zoroastrianism

He [the spiritual guide]
shall reveal himself unto the wise,
by bringing blessings, teaching Truth to men.

Zoroaster¹⁰⁰

Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest surviving religions of the world: "A religion which is probably as ancient as Judaism, and which certainly taught the immortality of the soul and the future state of rewards and punishments...a religion which ages prior to Christianity announced that a person must be pure in thought as well as in word and deed, and that sins must be repented of before they could be atoned for; a religion whose followers were forbidden to kill even animals wantonly...such a pure and venerable religion is one which must always command the respect of the civilised world, and of which a Parsee may well be proud." So writes Arthur Henry Bleek in *Avesta: The Religious Books of the Parsees*.¹⁰¹

Many ancient Greek authors placed the work of Zoroaster, who is also known as Zarathustra, as sometime between 6,000 to 7,000 B.C., but modern historians tend to believe that he may have lived between 1,500 and 550 B.C. Zoroaster's books, even those that have survived this long period of time, reveal that even in that distant past he preached devotion to the Word as the highest worship of the Lord.

It appears that from his childhood Zoroaster had to face calamity after calamity and was persecuted by people around him, imprisoned by the authorities and finally murdered while at devotion. He wrote of having to face terrific opposition from the priests:

When shall this rotting mass of lies dissolve,
by which the priests their dupes do fascinate?¹⁰²

Zoroaster's works show that he wrote from personal experience when he spoke of the spiritual worlds, of the Negative Power or the forces of evil, and the Positive Power leading to

God. He wrote of heaven and hell and of vast spiritual regions; he made it clear that the Day of Judgement is not some far-off doomsday, but one that has to be faced immediately after death. He did not talk about the resurrection of dead bodies at some distant date in the future.

Zoroaster held that this body is the prison house of the soul, from which it must be resurrected. This is what biblical writers meant by 'resurrection'—that which is now interpreted as physical resurrection at some future date, even of those who died millions of years ago, and whose very bones have disappeared. The biblical word 'resurrection' has a mystical meaning which has often been misinterpreted. Zoroaster used the word in its true sense and repeated over and over again that not only has he himself resurrected his soul, but that this resurrection is the aim of life:

Realization of the self-existent

Absolute Being, Vahishtem Ahum,

Of the supreme, omniscient Life Giver, Ahura Mazda,*

Is the ultimate goal of Zoroastrianism.¹⁰³

Zoroaster was succeeded by a long line of Masters who, like the nine Gurus who succeeded Guru Nanak, did everything in the name of their Master and the Lord. It is said that there were about thirteen successors of Zoroaster, who called themselves Zarathustrotema, which implies that Zoroaster also believed in the need for a living Master. If that were not so, what need would there have been for the long line of successors? Nowhere in the Gathas, the works of Zoroaster,

* Ahura Mazda: a Zoroastrian term for the Supreme Lord.

did Zoroaster say that he was the only Master; that there had been none before him and would be none after him. On the contrary, he said:

Even the *dasyns*, the tribes uncivilized,
will have Saoshyantas [Masters],
sent to give them teaching and look after them.¹⁰⁴

Take up the disciplines enjoined by the Saoshyantas,
the lovers of mankind, Masters of the highest yoga,
for your soul's welfare.

In thought, word and deed, take them up.

In every land, even those of the barbarians,
are there Saoshyantas
who have attained the great peace and Godhood.

This sovereign of the world has sent down
righteous saints unto us, Saoshyantas
to show us the right path.¹⁰⁵

The Gathas and other sacred books of Zoroastrians explain the Word as the power that carries the soul back to the Supreme Soul, and repeated prayers are made in the Gathas that the Word may be revealed to the worshipper. Thus ancient Persia echoes the same views on the Word as do the saints of India.

Sraosh is the Zoroastrian equivalent for Word. The word 'Sraosh' comes from the Sanskrit root word *shru*, meaning 'to hear'. Its help is invoked in all difficulties, and specially at the time of someone's death and for three consecutive days and nights thereafter.

Indian Masters refer to five Shabds or Words. These are also mentioned in the Avesta prayer Hom Yasht as Pancha Nam: *Pancha nam ahmi, pancha nam noit ahmi*¹⁰⁶ which means 'I belong to Five Names (the positive power, the power that takes us upward); I do not belong to five names (the negative power—the mind—that takes us downward and finds expression in lust, anger, greed, attachment and egoism).' In the Zoroastrian prayer, the Hormazd Yasht, the term Nam and its implications are given. That prayer is full of praise of the Word. God's very being is incarnated in the holy Word.

It is said that Zoroaster asked God which is the strongest part of the holy Word. The Lord answered, "Our names, O Spitama Zarathustra, the names of us, the Amesha Spentas [holy immortals]—that portion of the Holy Word is the most powerful."¹⁰⁷

The Word which Ahura Mazda created,
He created in infinite time.¹⁰⁸

I invoke Sraosh [the Word],
the greatest servant of the Lord,
to help me reach the final goal of life –
achieving life eternal, one with the Lord,
within the fold of his Love.¹⁰⁹

To those who obey [listen to] his Word
truly in their hearts
shall come perfect immortal life.¹¹⁰

The sacred Word of Ahuna Vairya
did I, Ahura Mazda, repeat....

The Word

The Word which was before the earth,
before the creatures, before the trees, before fire,
[before] the son of Ahura Mazda,
before the holy man, before the evil ones...
before all corporeal life,
before all the good creation of Mazda,
the seed of Asha —

This Word of mine, Ahuna Vairya...
intoned without interruption and without omission
is equal to a hundred other holy chants,
O Spitama Zarathustra.

And whosoever in this corporeal life,
O Spitama Zarathustra,
mentally repeats this Word of mine,
and further, mentally repeating, mutters it,
and further muttering it, chants it aloud,
and further, chanting it aloud, sings its praises,
his soul will I, Ahura Mazda, help to cross
over the bridge into the best world,
into the highest world,
the world of truth, the realm of eternal light.¹¹¹

It appears from the Gathas that, as in the Bible, several words such as Truth, Love, Wisdom, and Righteousness are sometimes used to denote Sraosh, the Word. Among other terms for Truth is 'Asha':

Through the best Asha, through the highest Asha,
may we get a vision of you,
may we draw near unto you,
may we be in perfect union with you.¹¹²

There is but one path – the path of Asha.
All others are false paths.¹¹³

This is also called the Path of Righteousness, which has nothing to do with the righteousness or goodness about which people ordinarily speak. Nor, it seems, have truth and untruth referred to by Zoroaster anything to do with telling the truth or falsehood. The Truth referred to by Zoroaster—and in the Bible and by other saints—is the Word, the eternal, unchanging, incorruptible first revelation of God, the creator and sustainer of the entire universe:

He who treads the path of Righteousness,
the path of service [devotion]
that you have best decreed,
shall march across your judgement bridge.¹¹⁴

Whosoever through Righteousness
fully achieves the renovation of his life on earth,
which is Ahura's will,
shall gain eternal life as his reward.¹¹⁵

Righteousness shall overcome untruth:
Such is your plan, the final shape of life.
This Truth Asha teaches.
All wise ones have realized this Truth.¹¹⁶

The Word is also referred to as the highest love, the divine love, of which worldly love is but a pale, unsteady and corrupt imitation:

From whom may my soul any help command?
No one but you, Asha, Mazda Ahura,
none but the highest love, invoked with Truth.¹¹⁷

The path of Truth is but the path of love.¹¹⁸

The word 'devotion' is also referred to in Zoroastrian scriptures as 'work' and 'deed'. Indian and Sufi saints emphasize that the only real work is devotion to the Word, and that the only deed of lasting value is the deed of devotion to the Word. Kabir Sahib says, "One who speaks [about devotion to the Word] is my grandchild, but one who acts [practises devotion] is my child."¹¹⁹

As in the Bible, the Word is described as the Holy Spirit:

Led by your Holy Spirit to the best,
his tongue shall utter only words of love,
and his life shall be guided by one single thought,
that only Ahura Mazda is the source of Truth.¹²⁰

This Holy Spirit's father true are you.¹²¹

It appears that in early Zoroastrian literature the Word was also known as the Wine, the Master as the Wineserver, and the inner spiritual centres within the human head as the tavern, as Sarmad referred to them in his rubaiyat. After the rise of Islam, hundreds of thousands of Zoroastrians were forcibly converted to Islam. Some few survived in Iran and a few others took shelter in India, where they constitute the enlightened community of the Parsis, who have been pioneers in many a sphere of Indian life.

Even after such forced conversion in Iran, some Zoroastrians continued to practise Zoroastrianism in secret. Their prayer

halls were called the tavern, spiritual love was described as wine, ecstasy was described as intoxication—words common to literature on mystic science throughout the world. The devotees of Zoroastrianism who continued this secret devotion could not have used these words unless their use was so common and so persistent as to enable them to avoid persecution. Dastur Khurshed S. Dabu, High Priest of the Parsis of Bombay, in his *Message of Zarathustra*, wrote:

Some of the converts (especially priests of the old faith) had nominal lip-allegiance to Islam, continuing secretly to believe in Zoroastrianism. They formed secret lodges and influenced Muslim philosophers with ideas new to them. They evolved a peculiar terminology. Their prayer halls (where usually an old Irani priest, Pir Mogh, presided) were called 'the tavern'. Sacred spiritual love was 'the wine', divine ecstasy was called 'intoxication with that wine' and the teacher of ecstasy was called 'the wine bearer'. All their songs were addressed to God under the name of 'The Beloved'. They had the outer guise of profligate licentious drunkards; but in their heart was the old devotional fervour of the old Zoroastrian teachings.¹²²

It is unfortunate and utterly wrong that Zoroastrianism is described as advocating fire worship. It stands for fire worship no more than Hinduism stands for stone worship, or Christianity for cross worship. The fire kept eternally burning within the Zoroastrian temple is symbolic of the fire and light to be found within our body, the fire and light that ultimately lead us to the Creator:

We yearn to see your inner fire.¹²³

Unto your inner flame I pay my homage.¹²⁴

Zoroastrians are believers in one Supreme Lord as much as are the devotees of Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism!

O you, Mazda! You the first and the last,
at the beginning and at the end of life.
According to your fixed eternal laws,
you award to each his just deserts,
reward or punishment, in word or deed –
ill unto ill, and good unto good.¹²⁵

You are beyond all this we see, Supreme!
Teach us that resignation and fortitude,
and that detached aloofness from the world,
which may join us unto you, Lord Mazda,
and make us thus to attain Self-realization.¹²⁶

Zoroastrian literature stresses that it is possible for us to reach Godhood—and that in a single life—and that a true Master and meditation according to his instructions are necessary for this:

Just as the sovereign Lord [is] all powerful,
so [is] the spiritual teacher by reason of his Asha.¹²⁷

But Ahura, to you do I appeal, as lover to beloved.
Teach me how I may be one with you in perfect bliss.¹²⁸

True Masters warn us against falling into the traps of false masters; so also did Zoroaster in his time:

So let no one give heed to teachers false,
who would hurl men down to the world
of torment and of death.¹²⁹

Between the shepherd true and false
should mortals ever choose as their protector
a Master who is ever true to Asha.

O Mazda! never may the wolf disguised
as pious shepherd share the Holy Truth.¹³⁰

The Word in Taoism

For Tao [the Word or Way] is hidden and nameless,
yet Tao alone supports all things
and brings them to fulfilment.

*Tao Te Ching*¹³¹

Find the Tao in yourself
and you will know everything else.

Kwan-Yin-Tse¹³²

Mysticism has been practised in many countries, as for example, in Greece, Babylon, Iran and China, but perhaps nowhere has it been so clearly and explicitly explained in such simple and easily understandable language as in India. China, however, also had its days of mysticism of a high order.

Lao Tzu, said to have been born about 600 B.C. in China, was a great mystic traditionally considered to be the founder

of Taoism.* Taoism refers to the Word as Tao, the inner light which supports the creation and which can be obtained by complete stillness of body and mind, and by shedding all attachments to the world while still living. The *Tao Te Ching*, the most famous of the Taoist scriptures, says:

He who having used the outer light,
can return to the inner light,
[and] is thereby preserved from all harm.¹³³

As the heavy must be the foundation of the light,
so quietness is the Lord and master of activity.¹³⁴

Learning consists in adding to one's stock day by day.
The practice of Tao consists in subtracting day by day,
subtracting and yet again subtracting,
till one has reached inactivity.
But by this very inactivity,
everything can be activated.¹³⁵

The Tao is also described as the Great Highway:

He who has the least scrap of sense –
one who has got started on the Great Highway –
has nothing to fear so long as he avoids turnings.
For Great Highways are safe and easy,
but men love by-paths.¹³⁶

* It is not certain whether Lao Tzu really existed, but he is said to be the author of the *Tao Te Ching*, the ancient book of Taoism. See Books and Authors Cited for more details.

The Word in Taoism

In the *Tao Te Ching*, the Word is also called 'the Always-So', which means unchanging, unchangeable and everlasting:

To understand the Always-So is to be illuminated.¹³⁷

Tao is forever, and he who possesses it,
though his body ceases, is not destroyed.¹³⁸

What Tao plants cannot be plucked,
what Tao clasps can never slip.¹³⁹

Tao gave them birth.

The power of Tao reared them,
shaped them according to their kind,
perfected them, giving to each of its strength.

This is called the Mysterious Power.¹⁴⁰

And here the *Tao Te Ching* gives a perfect description of the Word:

The Tao is not exhausted by the greatest,
nor is it absent even from the least.

In all things is it found, complete and evenly diffused.

How wide its universal comprehension!

How utter its unfathomableness!

The embodiment of its great attributes,

in righteousness and benevolence,

is but a small part of its persuasion.

Its subtle working is in the heart of man.

Only the perfect Man knows this for sure,

and only such can hold charge of the world.¹⁴¹

The Word

There is a thing inherent and natural,
which existed before heaven and earth.
Motionless and fathomless,
it stands alone and never changes.
It pervades everywhere
and never becomes exhausted.
It may be regarded
as the Mother of the Universe.
I do not know its name.
If I am forced to give a name
I call it Tao.¹⁴²

The method of the mystic is beautifully described in *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* by Arthur Waley:

Without leaving his door,
he knows everything under heaven.
Without looking out of his window,
he knows all ways to heaven.
For the further one travels,
the less one knows.
Therefore, the sage arrives without going,
sees all without looking,
does nothing, yet achieves everything.¹⁴³

Taoism maintains that the mystics do not reveal their inner experiences, and they live in complete detachment:

Those who know do not speak;
those who speak do not know....

The Word among the Jews

He who has achieved it cannot either
be drawn into friendship or repelled;
cannot be benefited, cannot be harmed;
cannot either be raised or humbled;
and for that very reason is the highest of all
creatures under heaven.¹⁴⁴

Long and short test one another;
high and low determine one another....
Therefore the sage relies on actionless activity;
carries on wordless teaching.¹⁴⁵

The Word among the Jews

All things of which this world consists, spirits as well as
bodies, will return to their principal, the root from which
they proceeded.

Zohar (The Book of Splendour)¹⁴⁶

Historical research conducted in ancient Egypt has revealed
that what was known as the worship of the Word was quite
extensively prevalent during the time of the Pharaohs some
3,000 years ago. Moses, who organized a successful revolt of
Jewish slaves in that country and led them on to the establish-
ment of an independent state of their own, was brought up
in the court of a Pharaoh, as the kings of Egypt were called,
and he seems to have been quite conversant with the worship
of the Word.

Mysticism in one form or another seems to have been prev-
alent among the Jews. Some biblical prophets referred to saints

as the Righteous and the Wise, as Men of Understanding and Men of Knowledge, and referred to the Word as Righteousness, Knowledge, and Understanding. The freedom from death they referred to clearly means rescue from the endless chain of birth and death. It could not mean rescuing from death those who are already alive, because one who is born must die.

The fanaticism with which some tenets of Judaism were upheld by some made it difficult for Jewish mystics to talk openly of the divinity of perfect Masters, but their intimate students seem to have known the truth. Their language, as recorded in the Bible, is understandable to mystics even today.

The Zohar, the chief text of the Kabbalah, is full of Jewish mystic teachings, but it does not mention the worship of the Word and the Master with the frankness we find among mystics in India, China, Persia and some other Middle Eastern countries. In today's circumstances the huge tome of the Zohar is unintelligible to the layperson, and only a Master can interpret what it all means. But it definitely establishes the existence of mysticism among the Jews.

The most recent Jewish mystical sect—if it can be so called—had its rise in the eighteenth century in the towns and villages of the Ukraine, Rumania and Poland. Hasidism,* as this mystic sect came to be called, flourished for well over a hundred years, even though the orthodox, the 'sophisticated' and the learned kept away from it with contempt. Its founder, Rabbi Israeli ben Eliezer, popularly known as Baalshem (Master of

* Hasidism (Chasidism): a mystical Jewish movement founded in Poland in the eighteenth century in reaction to the rigid academicism of the rabbinical Judaism. The movement declined sharply in the nineteenth century but Hasidism is still influential in Jewish life, particularly in Israel and New York City in the United States.

the wonderful Name of God), started life as the attendant at a village prayer-house. He married the sister of a Jewish scholar, and for a full seven years wandered about with her in the Carpathian mountains. He faced great privation, but worked to earn his livelihood by his own hands, while still spending long hours in prayer and meditation. The orthodox Jews regarded him as a heretic who had travelled far, far away from Judaism. But his teachings found an instant response in the hearts of simple people, who followed him with unshakeable faith and indomitable determination.

Martin Buber, the renowned German-Jewish scholar and intellectual, devoted a 200-page book entitled *Jewish Mysticism* to a discussion of Hasidism. The book, which has been translated from German into English by Lucy Cohen, reveals that the core of the teachings of Hasidism is the same as the teachings of the true Masters.

It states that God pervades the entire creation, including what is imagined to be inanimate creation. The soul of every human being is a spark of divinity and the principal duty of each person is to take the soul back to its source. This can be done by the power of Shekhinah, the equivalent of the Name or Word, which is described as the Emanation and Glory of God, whose presence and power sustain every creature.

Unlike the teachings of the Bible, in which, according to the Orthodox, a single messiah is expected to redeem Israel, Hasidism spoke of 'continuous messiahship'. In fact, quite a few Zaddiks, as the Jewish Masters were called, continued the work started by Rabbi Eliezer. 'Continuous messiahship', a phrase used by Martin Buber, is completely in consonance with the practices taught by the Masters of other countries. The 'throne' of the true Masters is never vacant.

The Zaddiks (literally, the Righteous, a word frequently used in the Old Testament to denote Masters), preached the banishing of all worldly desires and the merging of them into a single desire to meet God.

Martin Buber, a sternly disciplined intellectual who would be convinced by nothing but positive proof, spoke in the highest terms of the devotion and spiritual achievements of the Hasids. The spiritual journeys of the Hasids, he said, revealed to them "knowledge unknown, facts unrevealed and bliss unimaginable". With that knowledge, he said, the Jewish Law and Commandment lost significance. He wrote:

But it [the ecstasy of travelling to higher regions] is the finality of thralldom, the shaking off of the last fetter, the release that comes from the dismissal of all that is earthly. When a man moves from strength to strength, and beyond and beyond, till he reaches the root of all learning and Law, to the 'I' of God, to simple unity and limitlessness as he stands there, all the wings of [Jewish] Law and of command are folded and are become as nothing, for all his evil desire is destroyed and he rises above it.¹⁴⁷

The movement degenerated after some time, but there soon came another Master, Rabbi Nachman, who abjured riches and comforts and "who was gentle to enemies and indifferent to death". Martin Buber spoke highly of the saintliness of Rabbi Nachman which, he said, "is comparable to that of many of the great saints whose lives are far more widely known." Rabbi Nachman's teachings were the same as those of all true Masters. Among his sayings recorded by Buber are:

Everything lives, grows, rises
and praises God in song...
and every blade of grass sings a song to God....
That which we see is only the external, the visible,
and that which is concealed from our view
is the internal, the root of it....
[God] is hidden in every secret place,
in the secret of secrets.¹⁴⁸

This is the language of one who has heard with his spiritual ears the entire creation singing the praises of God, and who has seen with his spiritual eyes the Lord pervading everywhere. It is not speculation, nor is it imitative repetition of what others have proclaimed.

Buber recorded that the movement grew "in narrow streets and gloomy little rooms". The most fertile ground for preaching the search for God is among those who have nothing to lose in this world but their misery, and who have the entire divinity to gain. In this connection it may be recalled that when a wealthy young man asked Jesus Christ to accept him as a disciple, Christ told him to give up all his wealth first. Present-day Masters—not so austere—ask their disciples only to detach their minds from worldly wealth.

Buber gave a few illustrations of *hitlahabut*, or spiritual ecstasy, experienced by devoted disciples. The disciples "did not claim it as their own achievement, but as a Grace, as a key to the Eternal, which removed all difficulties on the path of the Eternal."

Like the disciples of all true Masters, the Hasids could come to experience continuous connection with the Lord,

hear the sound of the Word, and repeat the Name of the Lord while they were doing their worldly work. Buber said that the disciple "walks with God even when he sits in the company of men, and though he mixes with people, yet he dwells apart from the world."¹⁴⁹

Buber noted that there was a Zaddik who went into ecstasy every time that the words "and God said" occurred in the reading of the scriptures. This is the experience of some devotees in India even today when they encounter their Master.

Buber explained that the ecstasy is not a sudden absorption into the Universal Soul, but a steady progress forward, progress that is constant and well controlled. It is unlike the ecstasy experienced by people who only have had spiritual attainment in their previous life. Such ecstasy may come by fits and starts and is not under a person's own control. The spiritual experiences of some Christian mystics come under this category. The ecstasy of the disciple of a true Master, on the other hand, is a laboratory process conducted under expert guidance. The process and the result are fixed and invariable.

One of the Hasids, according to Buber, saw his dead Master in a dream and the Master told him that:

From the hour of his death, each day he went onwards from world to world. And that world which yesterday was spread as the heaven above his eyes, today lay beneath his feet, "and the heaven of yesterday is the earth of today. And each world is purer and more beautiful and more profound than the world before it. The angels rest in God but the saints move forward. The angel is stationary

and the saint is a traveller. Therefore, the saint is above the angel."¹⁵⁰

The description of one spiritual region above another, each more beautiful and profound, exactly fits with the description given by hundreds of saints who have always proclaimed that human beings are higher than the angels because, while human beings can reach Godhood, angels and all other created beings cannot. That is God's arrangement, and there can be no argument about it, the Masters say.

The true life of a person of rapture, declares Buber, is not among humankind:

He thinks nothing of honours, and nothing of anything for his own advantage. His one thought is to return to the city of his birth. He can possess nothing, for he knows that all is foreign and he must go home.¹⁵¹

That exactly is the condition of all real mystics, Buber further recorded. This state of being is amazing to intellectuals and rationalists, but commonly accepted in India:

In ecstasy all the past and future turn into the present. Time crumbles; the limits of eternity vanish. Only the moment remains, and the moment is eternity.¹⁵²

The Zaddiks faced the most extreme physical pain and suffering with transcendent courage. They met death with smiling faces. Buber recorded a legend from the life of Rabbi Sussa, a Zaddik:

Rabbi Susa called out in astonishment when his hand shrank from the fire in which he had put it: "How coarse Rabbi Susa's body has become, that it can fear fire!" The man who is aflame with [spiritual] ardour has command over life, and no outward event that intrudes within his ken can disturb his sanctity.¹⁵³

That is how Sarmad, Mansur, Shams-i Tabriz, Teg Bahadur and a host of other saints have faced death.

It is well known that some mystics in the joy of ecstasy dance in a manner in which no earthly person has ever danced, and sing to melodies that no earthly musician has ever discovered. Buddha, it is said, on attaining *nirvana*, the state of eternal inner bliss, danced for several days around the tree at the foot of which he had been sitting in meditation. Mira Bai's mystical songs and dances arouse the admiration of the whole of India; and the liberal-minded Muslim Emperor Akbar, who went incognito to see Mira Bai in ecstasy, was moved to such devotion that he fell at her feet and lay prostrate until he was lifted up and removed by his Hindu prime minister. Buber noted similar experiences in connection with Rabbi Susa:

Among all who saw his holy dancing there was not one in whom a divine conversion did not take place. In the heart of all who beheld him he aroused both weeping and delight.¹⁵⁴

Among devout Jews the ten days between the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement are given over to intense heart-searching and prayers. These are called the 'awful days'—in Central Europe, the word 'awful' being used in its root

meaning, 'fear of God'. Buber, as an intellectual who remained unmoved by anything superstitious, wrote of the mystic singing of a Zaddik:

A Zaddik stood during the 'awful days' and his voice sang new melodies, wonder upon wonder, which the Zaddik had never heard, and which the ears of man had never heard, and he knew not what he sang, nor in what manner he sang, for he was transported to the world above.¹⁵⁵

All mystics emphasize that the tunes and melodies of our songs in the world are but pale imitations of the indescribably rapturous harmonies in spiritual regions.

To Hasids, the theories of rebirth and transmigration, the stories regarding seeing one spiritual region above the other, the claim of the omnipresence of the Lord in the entire creation, were no mere theories and stories. Buber said:

The legends of the Hasids tell much of those wonderful men who could remember their earlier forms of existence and who were as sure of their own future as of their own heartbeats; who looked from one end of the earth to the other and saw all the changes which happened in the worlds, and who were as much aware of them as though they occurred in their own body.¹⁵⁶

As a devotee passes into higher regions, he is so much absorbed in spiritual life that he forgets his own existence. One travels from one region to another as one would walk from

one room to another in his own house. Children are excited over the new sights they see in their trips and excursions, but not experienced travellers. Buber noted the same condition of advanced Hasids:

There is a very high grade of holiness; when a man reaches this, he is freed from the sense of his own existence and is incapable of fervour.¹⁵⁷

The Hasidic explanation of the creation tallies with that of the Masters. According to Buber, a Hasidic Master said:

The creation of heaven and earth is the unfolding of something out of nothing, the descent of the higher into the lower. But the saints who are freed from themselves and who ever cleave unto God, see and comprehend Him in reality.¹⁵⁸

The Hasidic teachings degenerated with the passage of time, and today the few Hasids who escaped Hitler's gas chambers have settled in Israel and other countries. Their mysticism has disappeared and outward symbols hold sway. But that, of course, is a story repeated everywhere.

This short chapter on Jewish mysticism cannot be closed without reference to Jehuda Halevi (1085–1140), a poet, writer and author of some remarkable devotional songs. He had such a magnificent personality that a sober historian wrote that the words 'God created man in His own image' applied to him most literally. Halevi earned his own livelihood as a physician. Only a mystic could write as he did:

The Significance of Church and Temple Bells

When I remove from you, O God,
I die while I live;
but when I cleave to you I live in death.¹⁵⁹

The writings and teachings of Jehuda Halevi and his group in the Dark Ages, and of the Hasids in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, deserve greater research and study at the hands of scholars who are also practising mystics.

The Significance of Church and Temple Bells

The voice of God is coming into my ear like an echo.
Rumi¹⁶⁰

The whole universe is full of this voice,
if only you open your ears and listen to it.
Then shall you hear the eternal speech
that transcends birth and death.

Niaz¹⁶¹

Every church, temple and gurdwara has a bell. Official Christianity explains that it is tolled for giving a call to the congregation. The *baang* (call) from the minaret of a mosque is also thus interpreted. On the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement in synagogues horns are blown, which Jewish authorities explain in their own way. The saints declare that all these are symbolic of the inner Sound, and were originally introduced to remind the devotees to call on the Name of the Lord.

In temples, churches, synagogues, mosques and gurdwaras, lights are kept burning throughout the day and night.

Churches have candles and vigil lights, and synagogues have lamps which are never allowed to be extinguished, an accidental extinction of which is considered an advance warning of a coming calamity. Saints explain that these lights are symbolic and are meant to be reminders to the devotees to attend to the inner Light.

Sarmad, like other mystics, describes the Word as the Light, the Sound and the Voice of the Lord. The last phrase is also frequently used in the Bible. Sarmad says:

You are renowned as the thief of hearts,
the glory of your friendship knows no parallel.
I am in love with this mystery of You –
You remain veiled,
yet your Light shines through all the creation.

Rubai 6

I have seen the burning and pain,
not in one but in one thousand places.
I have seen the play of the moth and the flame –
The source of Light is in some other Hand.

Rubai 199

For the heart that knows, the Beloved is close,
for the eye that sees, his presence is everywhere.
When ears become hearing –
nothing but the Beloved's Name.
When the tongue is adept,
every word carries mysteries.

Rubai 48

The Significance of Church and Temple Bells

The Word is one and pervades the entire creation, residing in every living creature. But as it comes down from the highest spiritual region to the material plane, it assumes different types of sound and light. It is like the sound of a river, which at its source has a particular sound; then, as it rushes through rocks and precipices, it assumes another type of sound. Rushing through a valley it gives a third kind of sound; coming to the plains it gives a fourth type, and at its meeting with the sea it creates a fifth. So does the Word assume five principal kinds of sounds while passing through the various spiritual regions.

After initiation, a disciple will sooner or later begin to hear the Sound during all the twenty-four hours of the day. The earliest sound is that of the bell. It is heard by the inner mind and soul and not by the physical ears. When initiated, even the deaf can hear the Sound and the blind can see its light. It is the only highway that leads to the Supreme Lord. No outward form of worship can do this, though intense outward devotion may sometimes give certain types of mystic experiences. But these are uncontrolled and come in fits and starts, and are not under the control of the devotee.

The pathway of the Word as shown by living saints assures sustained and systematic progress, the speed of which depends on the effort of the individual and the grace of the Master, which is showered according to the fitness of the disciple.

For unknown ages people have tried to control their passions and senses, but without success. People have practised austerities and disciplines with magnificent heroism and endurance according to all scriptures, but have failed to control their passions. The mind cannot be controlled by its own effort—it is like trying to raise oneself by one's bootstraps.

Such disciplines have often led to disastrous reactions. The Word alone can control the senses and the passions.

The sound of the Word is so fascinating that, as one begins to hear it and see its light, the pleasures of the senses automatically become insipid. Prof. E. Allison Peers says:

The senses that ascetics suppress, mystics devote to the worship of the Lord. The things of senses that the ascetics forsake, mystics offer to God. Ascetics forsake the things of sense, and forsaking them, they suffer in the flesh; the followers of mysticism offer them to the Lord. In this above all else does worship consist.¹⁶²

The mind, which is all the time looking out for happiness and pleasure, is detached from earthly pleasures when it becomes fascinated by the music of the Word. It attaches itself to the bliss of the Word eternal, and the soul makes natural and well controlled progress through the spiritual regions. As it advances, the soul experiences greater and greater joy, knowledge and wisdom. It then comes to know the why and wherefore of everything. Spiritual knowledge is no longer a matter of speculation and blind belief. The devotee sees everything with his own inner eyes. The theories of reincarnation and transmigration are no longer theories. He sees injustice, cruelty, tyranny, oppression, poverty and ill-health in this world; and he finds the why and wherefore of these things.

When an ordinary person says that God is merciful, that his bounty is boundless, he merely repeats without any personal experience what saints have said. But when a mystic says that God is merciful, he sees his mercy in the face of all evils. The Masters know the defects, faults and failings of all

The Word: A Categorical Summary

worldly things and beings. They have perfect knowledge of all worldly affairs, but keep silent about everything because they have come to take souls back to the Lord, and not to correct the affairs of the world.

They are perfect themselves and they make every disciple perfect. "Be ye therefore perfect," said Christ, "even as your Father in heaven is perfect."¹⁶³ That is the work of all perfect Masters. The Word is the alchemy, and the human body is the laboratory in which all these experiments are made and knowledge and wisdom are obtained. Those who doubt this can go to a living true Master and test the truth of this claim for themselves.

The Word: A Categorical Summary

If you tell a thirsty man,

"Hurry, here is a cup of water, drink it quickly!"

will he reply, "How do I know you speak the truth?"

Go, liar, and leave me alone."?

Or suppose a mother calls to her suckling babe,

"I am your mother, come, my child!"

Will the babe reply, "Prove it to me first,

only then will I take comfort in your milk."?

Rumi¹⁶⁴

Categorically, we may now summarize the significance of the Word in mystic devotion. All true Masters are agreed that:

The Word resides in all human beings and sustains their body, mind and soul. It pervades the entire creation, including all living beings. Only in the human body can the Word

be revealed by a true Master. When so revealed the Sound can be heard by the initiate all the twenty-four hours of the day. Hearing the Word, which is the Command or Power of God, is the only form of worship truly acceptable to the Lord. The sound of the Word is so fascinating and its light so attractive, that hearing and seeing it automatically brings about detachment from the world. On the other hand, mere mental suppression of desires and attachments often leads to harmful reactions.

Devotion to the Word alone can give one contentment, happiness and peace. The only wealth worth collecting is the wealth of the Word, which is imperishable and eternal. Passions can be brought under permanent control only by devotion to the Word. The mind is cleansed of all its sins by devotion to the Word. Devotion to the Word opens the door to all knowledge, understanding and wisdom. It opens the doors of all higher spiritual regions until one meets God face to face and becomes one with Him. It uncovers all the mysteries of life. One sees everything with one's spiritual eyes, and there is no need for indulgence in speculation and idle discussion. Worship of the Word covers all other forms of devotion, all acts of charity, public work, national or social service. The worship of the Word is the highest service.

A few quotations from mystics that support the above statements are given below.

Within the body there is played, O Kabir,
music unending – played without instruments.
That music, the Word,
resounds throughout creation.

The Word: A Categorical Summary

Whoever listens is freed from illusion
and meets the Lord face to face.

Kabir¹⁶⁵

He in whose heart the Name of the Lord
resounds day and night,
Ravidas declares, that devotee is equal
to the Lord himself –

He is free from passion and anger.

Ravidas¹⁶⁶

Dadu says all are bound together by the Word;
all are dissolved in the Word.

Everything is created by the Word
and merges in the Word.

Dadu proclaims that you get Truth
only through the Word,
contentment only through the Word.

The Word alone gives stability.

All sorrow vanishes before the Word.

Dadu¹⁶⁷

The Name of the Lord is dearer to me than life.
I have nothing to do with anything
except that Name....

A particle of the Name of the Lord
destroys millions of mountains of sins
and burns them to ashes.

That is the glory of the Name of the Lord.

Baba Malukdas¹⁶⁸

The Word

By the touch of the philosopher's stone,
iron is turned into gold.

Dariya says that the Name is the philosopher's stone,
which easily gives a new turn to life.

Dariya Sahib of Marwar¹⁶⁹

Dariya says: Take the grace of the Word
from a perfect Master
and practise the yoga of Nam.

It opens the door of knowledge, lengthens life
and frees the body from disease.

Dariya Sahib of Marwar¹⁷⁰



The Master

In the Bible

I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Bible, *John* 8:12

I and my Father are one.

Bible, *John* 10:30

For those who seek to travel the higher path, Sarmad explains the rule that a living true Master is absolutely essential. He uses the terms Friend or the Wineserver for the Master. Without the Master's initiation and guidance, completing the inner journey is an impossibility, and going along the path even for a short distance may end in tragedy. Sarmad holds that a human being's first and highest duty is to search for a true Master, and those who neglect this duty fail in the sole real object of life. For the Master is God made flesh,¹⁷¹ who comes to this earth to take souls back to their real home by bestowing Nam and teaching the technique of God-realization. Sarmad writes:

The Master

Seek a Friend who will never be unfaithful,
nor wound your heart in friendship –
one who is ceaselessly in your embrace,
never even a step away.

Rubai 108

Whenever you meet the flower-scented Cupbearer,
say prayers of thankfulness first.
Do not miss the intoxication of helpless longing,
but stay alert, so you do not miss
the pain that lingers.

Rubai 143

Was there anything novel, anything extraordinary in what the great saint Sarmad preached? Another saint born into the Jewish tradition sixteen hundred years before him fearlessly made the claim not only that he and God were one, but that none could reach God except through him. He announced that he could give them the Bread of Life and the Water of Life that would make them perfect, even as their Father in Heaven was perfect; that devotion for the Word (God manifested) was the only real form of worship, because God was Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. Finally, and above all, he said that he was the Light of the World only as long as he was in the world, and thus emphasized the need for a contemporary Master who can open one's spiritual eyes and ears.

Jesus Christ put this subject in plain language when he declared:

I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.

Bible, *John* 14:6

The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

Bible, *John* 14:10

Faith in the Master is an absolute essential. It is the Master who provides the Bread of Life and the Water of Life to the soul on its homeward journey:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life.... This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever.

Bible, *John* 6:47, 48, 50, 51

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Bible, *John* 4:14

Jesus Christ exhorted his disciples not to waste their time in gathering worldly tinsel, but to concentrate on collecting spiritual wealth:

The Master

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

Bible, *Matthew* 6:19, 20

Perfect Masters are not only perfect themselves, but make every one of their disciples perfect—they attain Godhood:

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Bible, *Matthew* 5:48

A true Master makes every one of his disciples his spiritual equal:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also.

Bible, *John* 14:12

It is impossible to worship God, whom we have never seen. He can be worshipped only when we see Him in the form of a Master who is the Word (God) made flesh, Spirit made flesh. Jesus Christ never claimed to be the first and the last Saviour, and he made clear the need for a living Master.

The Master in Other Spiritual Literature

Deem thou the Guru and God as One.

Guru Arjun¹⁷²

Except for the Satguru, no one is going to get the individual liberated.

Baba Jaimal Singh¹⁷³

How is a true Master to be recognized? Masters have themselves made the point clear in their own literature. There are outward as well as inward signs which leave no room for error. Among the outward signs are the following:

True saints live like ordinary citizens. They wear no special clothes, ochre-coloured robes, flowing mantles or habits to distinguish them from the people among whom they live. They put on no caste marks, do not apply sandalwood paste to their foreheads, or ashes to their bodies. They lead a family life and do not hide themselves in jungles, mountains or caves. They are vegetarians and against the use of all intoxicating drugs and drinks.

They earn their own livelihood. Among Indian saints, Tukaram was a grocer, Namdev a tailor, Ravidas a shoemaker, Gora Kumbhar a potter, Savta Mali a gardener, Narhari a goldsmith, Supach a tanner, Kabir a weaver, Guru Nanak a farmer, Baba Jaimal Singh Ji a soldier, Maharaj Sawan Singh Ji a military engineer, Maharaj Jagat Singh Ji a professor of chemistry and Maharaj Charan Singh Ji a lawyer and a farmer. They do not accept for their own use any gifts or any charity from anyone, not even from their disciples, and one who does receive gifts or charity is not a true saint. They come here as givers, not as receivers.

True Masters give little or no importance to temples, mosques and churches, pilgrimages to holy cities, bathing in holy rivers, or visits to shrines (*dargaahs*). They count no beads, and pictures showing them with rosaries around their

necks or in their hands are imaginary, products of ignorance and gross misrepresentations.

Saints are not interested in founding religions or organizing sects or cults. The establishment of these after their death is sometimes the result of the ignorance, narrow-mindedness, greed and lust for position and power of people who claim to be their followers. True Masters promise no worldly wealth or success. They give no charms and amulets nor other means to worldly gain. They do not recall dead spirits or practise occultism. They work no miracles for public exhibition, though they may do so for the spiritual advancement of their disciples. They are not keen on a large following; they neither seek nor spurn it. Whoever humbly comes to them for grace gets it.

The inward signs of a true Master are the following:

When he initiates disciples, he places his astral form within them and guides and directs the initiates even if they are thousands of miles away from the physical form of the Master. After the disciples have reached a particular stage in spiritual progress they can see the Master in his astral form. Thereafter the Master in his astral form, and still subtler forms, accompanies them right through the entire inner journey until they are taken to the pure spiritual region that is beyond all gross material and mental worlds. It is only with the constant and continuous help of a Master that disciples are able to traverse the various lower, temptation-infested regions.

At the time of death, in the case of most people, it is the Messenger of Death who drags their souls from their bodies. For disciples, the Master himself appears in his astral form to place their soul in a region best suited for their spiritual progress. Disciples who have loyally carried out their devotion are permanently freed from death. They do not have to

be born again. The seal of a true Master is eternal, and even those who neglect their devotional practice are brought back into the human body again and placed in circumstances in which devotion to the Lord will be the central object of their life. Even the most recalcitrant and the most disobedient are rescued.

Now we shall go on to quote chapters and verses from Sikh, Hindu and Muslim (Sufi) saints—both medieval and modern—regarding the importance of the Master for travelers on the spiritual path.

The following quotes appear in the *Adi Granth*, the scripture in which the verses of the saints in the line of Guru Nanak and a few other saints of the Indian subcontinent, both Muslim and Hindu, are recorded. The *Adi Granth* has become the most sacred scripture of the Sikhs, but it is also revered by people of other religions in the area.

If man meets the saintly true Guru,
then does he find [God], the treasure of excellences.

Guru Nanak¹⁷⁴

The Guru is God and God is the Guru, O Nanak.
There is no difference between the two, my brother.

Guru Ram Das¹⁷⁵

The Shastras, Vedas and Smritis, I have all searched
and they all say but one thing:
Without the Guru, none obtains salvation.
Observe and consider this in thy mind.

Guru Arjun¹⁷⁶

The Master

Sans the Guru's instructions
no one attains to the Name.
By the favour of the Guru
it is implanted in the mind....
Within my mind the divine light has dawned
and the darkness of ignorance is dispelled.
My light has merged with the supreme Light.
My mind is propitiated,
and I am blessed with glory in the Lord's court.

Guru Amar Das¹⁷⁷

Several quotes of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Masters of the Radha Soami Satsang are given below. Soami Ji Maharaj says:

The Master who practises Shabd is a true Master —
Make yourself the dust of his feet.¹⁷⁸

Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

The Guru or the Master is the fountainhead of the knowledge of God, and he is more valuable than our physical body, our mind and all our wealth. Therefore we should sacrifice all these things to win his Grace.¹⁷⁹

Saints and other holy people come into this world to give their spiritual message. Imbued with the bliss of God-realization, they reveal the secret of his reality to the hearts of the seekers.¹⁸⁰

The Master in Other Spiritual Literature

When good luck brings you in contact with a true Master, offer all your love to Him. Give up attachment to the world and the worldly objects and discard the path of the mind and senses.¹⁸¹

So long as we do not see God, these God-realized souls, who are God-men on earth, are truly fit for our worship and worthy of our devotion.¹⁸²

Maharaj Charan Singh says:

God is infinite and cannot be easily approached in his infinite and universal form; but He is localized, as it were, and centred in his saints and devotees.¹⁸³

Tens of thousands of illiterate, simple Indian peasants have flocked to hear these saints at Beas, listening to them in pin-drop silence and understanding everything they have said because of the utter simplicity in which the most profound spiritual knowledge has been conveyed. And of what profundity that knowledge is can be realized from the fact that Maharaj Jagat Singh, the Master at Radha Soami Satsang Beas between 1948 and 1951, said many times that the full significance of the hymns in the Granth Sahib and *Sar Bachan* could only be grasped when one has reached the highest spiritual region.

Many other mystics offer the same message about the importance of the Master.

Tulsi Sahib (1763–1848) was born in Poona in Maharashtra and was heir apparent in the ruling family of the Peshwas. He escaped from Poona on the eve of his assumption of office and

went in search of God and eventually settled in Hathras in Uttar Pradesh. He said:

The human body is a rare divine gift,
it blossoms in the nectar of the [spiritual] lotus.
Only surrender yourself to the Master
and you will get the fruit
that grows in the region inaccessible
and gives immortality.
Even through a billion efforts
you cannot fathom the region unfathomable.
You cannot know it without the company of saints
and the power
of the merciful Master of the humble.¹⁸⁴

Dadu Dayal (1544–1603) was born into a family of cotton carders in the state of Gujarat and began teaching the practice of the Name in Rajasthan when he was nineteen. A contemporary of Emperor Akbar, he said:

O Dadu, in secret I got a perfect Master
and obtained his grace.
He blessed me and showed me
the Unfathomable and the All-Pervading....
My Master caught me by my hair
when I was drowning in worldly life.
He put me in his boat and took me across
[to the shore of salvation].¹⁸⁵

Ravidas (c.1414–1540) was a cobbler whose spiritual headquarters was in Varanasi in the fifteenth century. Among

his disciples was the renowned Mira Bai, Queen of Chittor. A contemporary of Kabir Sahib, he wrote:

He [the Master] tells spiritual tales
and explains their meaning.
He has achieved salvation
and gives salvation to others.
If you find such a servant,
you will escape the hangman's rope
for a million lives.¹⁸⁶

Paltu Sahib (1710–1780) lived in Ayodhya and was a grocer by profession. A disciple of and successor to Gobind Singh, he stated:

O Paltu, the saint is a mirror –
everybody can look into it.
It is our face that is distorted,
not the mirror.

Worship only that God who is the God of gods.
Paltu says: If you want to do real devotion,
go and serve your Master.¹⁸⁷

Sahjobai, a woman saint of Rajasthan who led a householder's life, was initiated by Charandas in the eighteenth century. She said:

Without the Master you cannot travel the path,
without the Master you cannot get knowledge.

Without the Master, Sahjo says,
everything is dark ignorance;
without the Master is complete ruination....
Sahjo says: Gaze at your Master with devotion.
Contemplate on your Master,
abandon all pride of your family
and serve your Master.¹⁸⁸

A number of other saints stress the importance of the living Master. Dharnidas, who lived in the seventeenth century in District Chhapra in Bihar, said:

O Dharni, wherever you go
there are only beggars.
The only Giver is the perfect Master,
and He never tires of giving....

O Dharni, many wander all over the country,
putting on a variety of garbs.
Rarely do you come across one
who shows you the true internal path.¹⁸⁹

Jagjivan Sahib (1682–1750) was born in Sarhada in Barabanki District in Uttar Pradesh and was a disciple of Bulla Sahib. He wrote:

The Satguru is the pillar of Truth
reaching up to the celestial sky.
He ties the rope [of the Word] to your soul,
a rope which does not break,
and which swings you up to the Kingdom of God.¹⁹⁰

The Master in Other Spiritual Literature

Dulandas (1660–1778) was born in Samesi in Lucknow District in Uttar Pradesh. Initiated by Jagjivan Sahib, he taught at his spiritual headquarters in Rai Bareilli until his death at the age of 118. He stated:

The faithful wife is happy
in the presence of her husband;
the hero is happy on the battlefield;
but Dulan says: The disciple of Truth
is perpetually happy,
he is free from all anxiety.¹⁹¹

And Gharibdas said:

I found a Master who is free
from all bondage and anxiety.
He is the perfect man, the supreme soul,
and in every particle of Him
there is the light of the sun and the moon.¹⁹²

Sena Nhavi, a barber by profession and a Maharashtrian saint of the fourteenth century, went into ecstasy at the very sight of his Master. He said:

Hark, it is a golden day today;
I saw my saint,
and I felt as happy as a newly married girl
going to her father's house [to visit].
All the weariness fell off my body.

Sena Nhavi¹⁹³

Chokha Mela was born into the 'untouchable' caste in Maharashtra in the thirteenth century and had no access to education or holy books, but this was no hurdle to spirituality. He said:

O Master, you are my father and mother;
I salute you, for I am a *mahar* among *mahars*.^{*}
But I am hungry only for your teachings;
I have brought a basket to carry them away.
Chokha says: I have no love for wealth
after tasting the sweetness of your Name.

Chokha Mela¹⁹⁴

Kabir (c.1398–1518) is one of the best known saints of India. He was born at Banaras (now known as Varanasi) and had his spiritual headquarters there. Tens of thousands in northern India still call themselves Kabir panthis, or followers of Kabir. His production of devotional songs was massive and awe-inspiring:

Such is the greatness of a perfect Master
that if all the world's surface were turned to paper
and all the forests into writing pens
and all the seven oceans into ink,
they could never describe his glory.

They are blind indeed, says Kabir,
who see the Master as other than God.

^{*} A *mahar* is a slave, a servant or a water carrier. The mahar community, to which Chokha Mela belonged, is one of the lowest in the Hindu caste system.

The Master in Other Spiritual Literature

For if the Lord is annoyed
you can take refuge in your Master,
but if the Master is angry
you can find no refuge.

Kabir¹⁹⁵

Bulla Saheb (1693–1768) was born Bulakiram and was a disciple of Yari Saheb. He gave spiritual discourses at Bhurkura, Gazipur District in Uttar Pradesh. He said:

While talking and dancing, laughing and playing,
while living in this world,
he [the Master] did everything for me.
All that I had to do was to make a petition,
without paying anything,
and Bulla got the benefit
of the labours of his Master.¹⁹⁶

The Sufi saints of the Middle East are no less emphatic concerning the need for worship of a Master:

With wine becolour the prayer-mat,
if the Pir of the Magians bid thee.*
For of the way and usage of the stages to God,
not without knowledge
is the Holy Traveller.

Hafiz¹⁹⁷

* Pir of the Magians: A Pir is a Master in the Sufi tradition. The Magians or Magi were priests in the Zoroastrian tradition, and the word 'Magian' came to denote a person with esoteric knowledge, for example the three Magi from the East who visited the infant Jesus.

The Master

Whoever would sit with God,
let him sit in the presence of the saints....
Whomsoever the devil cuts off
from that noble company
finds himself with none to aid him,
and the devil devours him.

Rumi¹⁹⁸

Everyone performs some sort of devotion
for the purpose of deliverance.
Go and take refuge in the shadow of the Sage,
that you may escape from the enemy
that secretly opposes you.
When the Pir has accepted you,
surrender to Him.
Submit like Moses to the authority of the Khizr.*

Rumi¹⁹⁹

Worldly sense is the ladder to this world;
religious sense is the ladder to Heaven.
Seek the well-being of your worldly sense
from the physician;
beg the well-being of your heavenly sense
from the Beloved.

Rumi²⁰⁰

* Khizr: the prophet who discovered and drank the water of life, thereby becoming immortal. According to tradition, he acts as guide for those who have lost the way.

The Master in Other Spiritual Literature

It is amazing how identical the ideas of all the saints are on the subject of true Masters. Even the words, phrases and figures of speech they use to illustrate their points are the same. It is not possible to convey in English the charm and utter simplicity of their style, or even the extraordinary conciseness with which they explain in a few words profound spiritual ideas and concepts in a language that the most illiterate and ignorant can understand.

In Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, God shall visit him, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

I am in your own soul. Why do ye doubt?

The human body is a brick of clay. According to the saints it is composed of five elements of earth, air, water, fire and ether, which are held together by the power of the Spirit. When is called the energy of creation, you are always in the body of every pore and every organ of the body. Every organ of the body is breathed in, the energy of creation is the power of the body is kept in a permanent state of life. The energy of

It is amazing how ideal the ideas of all the Masters are on the subject of language. Even the words phrases and figures of speech they use to illustrate their points are the same. It is not possible to convey in English the charm and simplicity of their language even in the most literal translation with which they explain in a few words profound spiritual ideas and concepts in a language that the most illiterate and ignorant can understand.

Noted in the early spiritual literature

the words of the Master are

The words of the Master are the words of the Sage.

That you may know the truth

that is the words of the Master.

When the Master speaks you know

the words of the Master.

When the Master speaks you know the words of the Master.

Rumi

Worldly men are the ladder to this world

and the ladder to Heaven

and the ladder to God

and the ladder to the Kingdom

and the ladder to the Kingdom of Heaven

and the ladder to the Kingdom of God

Rumi

When the prophet who descended from the mountain of life, the Master, came to this world he was not a man but a guide for those who have lost the way.



The Temple of God

In Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

Bible, *I Corinthians* 3:16, 17

I am in your own soul. Why see ye not?

Qur'an²⁰¹

The human body is a bundle of contradictions. According to the saints it is composed of five elements all hostile to each other, which are held together by the power of the Word. Man is called the crown of creation, yet no animal is so frail. Out of every pore and every opening the body exudes impurities; fresh air breathed in, for example, is sent out befouled. The body is kept in a precarious state of health by a sustained

The Temple of God

effort, yet we are so proud of it that from morning to night we labour to feed, clothe and bedeck it. Ill health haunts us from birth until death, and yet we quarrel and fight, hate and despise, scheme and plan and conspire, all to glorify ourselves. We seek wealth, honour and position for a life span that is but a moment in eternity. What are we proud of? Our youth, beauty, strength, intellect, wealth and authority—all these last but a few years and vanish into nothingness.

Yet there is no denying the fact that human beings are the crown of creation. The Bible calls the body the temple of the living God. Islam calls it *ashraf al-makhlooqaat* (highest of all the creation). The Hindus call it *nar naaraayani deh* (the body through which we attain the Supreme Lord). Sarmad says that we should take advantage of human life:

Those who looked with eyes of desire
at this garden of existence missed out.

Thorns and dead flowers they picked
and then departed.

This mask of creation is full of inner meaning –

Woe to those who did not grasp this,
and then departed.

Rubai 37

The Christian and Jewish scriptures proclaim that the human body is the temple of the living God:

For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Bible, *II Corinthians* 6:16

In Genesis, the very first book of the Old Testament, it is written:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness....So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.

Bible, *Genesis* 1:26, 27

The following verse refers to hearing the Voice of the Lord at the inner gates, at the eye centre:

Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For who so findeth me findeth life.

Bible, *Proverbs* 8:34, 35

The Psalms, it was once believed, were written by King David. But research has shown them to be the work of more than one person, some written by ordinary men, some by those practising outward forms of worship, and others by saints who had achieved high spiritual attainment. When these saints spoke of the 'enemies' who had been harassing them and making their lives miserable, they spoke of the struggle against the passions and sense desires, and not of human enemies. When they spoke of the holy temple, they referred to the human body—'worship in the holy temple' can have only this meaning. 'An enquiry in his temple' can only mean getting knowledge through mystic practice.

But where is the Lord to be found in the body? All scriptures point to the same spot. Judaism ordains that every Jew should wear *teffilin* in the morning, afternoon and night while

at prayer. The *teffilin* consists of two tiny leather boxes, one so tied around the left arm that the box touches a spot near the heart, the other in the centre of the forehead. The *teffilin* contains the text:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Bible, *Deuteronomy* 6:5

Why is the *teffilin* fixed in the middle of the forehead? The orthodox Jew explains that there, within, is the seat of thought. The mystic goes further and says that this is the seat of thought and also of the soul. From here the Word spreads all through the body, and with its power human beings carry out all their work. It is significant that this is the same spot where orthodox Hindus apply sandalwood paste to the forehead, and all Hindu women apply *kumkum*, a red powder. Mystics say this represents the eye centre—the inner point of focus—and is the starting point of the spiritual journey.

By the practice of concentration as taught by the Masters, the mind is stilled and withdrawn to this centre, where it contacts the power of the Word. After the withdrawal is complete, the soul, while the body is still alive, takes an upward journey from one spiritual region to another until it reaches the Supreme Lord. The entire journey, amazingly enough, terminates within, and this is symbolized by the place on the head where orthodox Hindus wear a tuft of hair and where Catholic priests make a circular shave on the scalp.

Christian references to this spiritual kingdom within include:

For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

Bible, *Luke* 17:21

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

Bible, *1 Corinthians* 3:16

Saint Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) says in his essay “Contemplation to Obtain Love”:

God dwells in the creatures and in the elements...in the plants...in the animals...in man...and so in me giving me being, life, feeling and understanding; and likewise making a temple of me, since I am created in the similitude and image of His Divine Majesty.²⁰²

The Qur'an and Sufi saints emphasize that it is through the human body alone that God can be realized. The position of human beings is so high that according to them:

God created man in His own Image.

Hadith²⁰³

He is with you, wheresoever you may be. And Allah* sees what you do.

Qur'an²⁰⁴

I read the Vedas, I read the Qur'an,
I read to the point of utter exhaustion.

* Allah: Islamic name for the Supreme Being.

The Temple of God

I bowed in prayer so much
my forehead became worn.
But God is not in pilgrimages,
nor is He at Mecca –
whoever found Him,
found Him within, my friend.

Bulleh Shah²⁰⁵

This body is the temple of the true Lord;
peep within it, O hermit.

Sultan Bahu²⁰⁶

The Beloved is with us day and night, O Hafiz;
he is the very life that flows in our veins.

Hafiz²⁰⁷

There is a basket full of bread on your head,
and you are begging for crumbs from door to door.
Attend to your own head, abandon foolishness;
knock at the door of your heart:
Why are you knocking at every other door?

Rumi²⁰⁸

If you would glimpse the beauty we revere,
look in your heart – its image will appear.
Make of your heart a looking glass and see
reflected there the Friend's nobility.
Your sovereign's glory will illuminate
the palace where he reigns in proper state.
Search for this king within your heart;
his soul reveals itself in atoms of the Whole.

Farid ud-Din Attar²⁰⁹

The Temple of God in Other Spiritual Literature

The Lord is everywhere and pervades every particle of the universe; but we can realize this only when we have first realized Him within ourselves....All saints have said with one voice that the human body is the real temple of God and He can be discovered only within this shrine.

Maharaj Charan Singh²¹⁰

The Adi Granth, and other spiritual literature as well, is full of hymns and verses which make it clear over and over again that only through the human body can God be realized, through the power of the Word and the grace of a living saint:

Within this body-cavern
there is an inexhaustible treasure.
In it abides the unseen and illimitable Lord.

Amar Das²¹¹

As fragrance is within the flower,
so the Lord is within you.
But as the musk deer searches for musk in the forest,
so you search for God outside yourself,
and find Him not.

Kabir²¹²

As oil is in the sesame seed, and fire in the flint,
so the Lord is within you, unrevealed.
Wake up and realize Him if you can.

Kabir²¹³

Why do you go about crying "Lord, Lord",
when the Lord is so near you?

The Lord is so near you;
seek Him within and He will reveal himself.

The rare and wondrous Lord can be seen
if you penetrate within.

Paltu Sahib²¹⁴

Listen, O Taqi, seek not your Beloved
in the world outside.

Within your own self
behold the splendour of your Beloved....

What is difficult, O Taqi,
is that it is hard to behold Him.

Without the grace of some realized Guide, says Tulsi,
the path of salvation is distant, beyond your reach.

Tulsi Sahib of Hathras²¹⁵

The Hindu scriptures offer the same message:

The one God is hidden in all beings...
the Witness, the Knower,
the only one devoid of qualities....

Eternal happiness belongs to the wise
who perceive Him as abiding in their self,
not to others.

Shvetashvatara Upanishad²¹⁶

China has a great deal of mystic literature, and Taoism and Confucianism are full of exhortations to search for God within the body. H.A. Gile's *Religions of Ancient China* quotes Shao Yung, a Chinese saint:

The Temple of God in Other Spiritual Literature

The heavens are still: no sound.
Where then shall God be found?...
Search not in distant skies;
in man's own heart He lies.²¹⁷

The same truth is many times repeated by Zoroaster:

Lord Ahura Mazda, grant unto us
to realize the difference between
our two selves, the physical lower one,
and the other higher one—the better one.
Of these two selves that Mazda gave to us,
the higher Self points ever to the right,
the lower one misleads us towards the left.²¹⁸

The human body is a miracle because God and the entire creation resides in it. Every thought and action, every experience through which the soul has passed in endless ages is recorded here. All knowledge, wealth and wisdom are stored within it, and yet we go outside in search of these. Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

It is a matter of surprise that the dweller in the mosque of ten doors (the human body) is suffering untold misery and pain in the artificial temples and mosques made by man.²¹⁹

But the best feature of the body is that it is the temple of the soul, and any respect or honour that is due to it, is deserved only so long as the soul resides in the body.²²⁰

The Temple of God

It is only the soul which is eternal in the body, and we should, therefore, make our best efforts to know all we can about it.²²¹

Human life is not easy to get, and the human form provides us with the only opportunity of meeting the Lord.²²²

The tragedy is that people realize the truth of this only after death. Maharaj Jagat Singh says:

The true value of the human body is realized after death, when man regrets that he has squandered his most precious possession.²²³

The unique quality in human life which is not present in other forms is the capacity for God-realization.... This rare privilege is not bestowed upon any other species. This is the time to seek a Master, learn the technique from Him and reach our eternal home, whence we do not return to this world again.²²⁴

Is God Divisible?

Adam Kadmon* contains in Himself all the souls of the Israelites, and He is Himself in every soul.

Zohar²²⁵

If God resides in every human being, are there then millions of Gods? No, reply the saints, He is one and yet complete

* Adam Kadmon: primal man. Adam Kadmon is a kabbalistic extension of the figure of Adam in the Bible. He is the first form taken by the divine creative Light, the mystical form of God as He reveals himself. Adam Kadmon is the macrocosm of which human beings are the microcosm.

Is God Divisible?

in every human being. That is the miracle of miracles. The one God appears in many forms, and Sarmad writes of this unity in diversity:

Sometimes You are a cypress,
sometimes a hyacinth and sometimes a jasmine.
Sometimes You are mountains and deserts,
and sometimes gardens.
Sometimes You are the light of the lamp,
and sometimes the fragrance of a flower.
Sometimes You are in the meadows,
and sometimes where people gather.

Rubai 312

God is indivisible and boundless and human beings receive Him indivisibly and boundlessly. God is the giver, and human beings are the beggars. The beggar goes on begging for everything in the world, and the Giver goes on giving until, completely disillusioned, the beggar asks for the Giver himself—and He then gives himself. That makes his bounty boundless, because He himself is boundless. Mikhail Naimy explains it beautifully in *The Book of Mirdad*:

Now, what is Man if not an offspring of this God? Can he be different from God? Is not the oak enswathed within the acorn? Is not God hidden in Man?...

No fraction of Himself did God endow you with—for He is infractionable; but with his godhood entire, indivisible, unspeakable did He endow you all. What greater heritage can you aspire to have?²²⁶

The Temple of God

Many saints have compared the concentration and uplift of the mind and the soul at the centre between the eyebrows to churning milk in order to extract butter. Just as butter is contained in milk and churning brings it to the top, so the attention of the mind and soul which is normally spread throughout the body is withdrawn by concentration and brought to the 'top', and from there begins mystic experience. Jalaluddin Rumi, a prince among Persian saints, writes:

Your true self is concealed in falsehood,
like the taste of butter is concealed in buttermilk.
Your falsehood is this perishable body;
your truth is the Spirit of the Lord.
For many years the buttermilk,
like the body, remains visible,
while the butter, like the spirit,
is perishing and treated as nothing,
till God sends a messenger, a chosen servant,
to shake the buttermilk in the churn
with method and skill,
and teach that your true self was hidden.²²⁷

'Twas a fair orchard full of trees
and fruits and vines and greenery.
A Sufi there sat with eyes closed,
his head upon his knee,
sunk deep in meditation mystical.
Why? asked another, do you not behold
these signs of God the Merciful,
displayed around you,
which He bids us contemplate?

Is God Divisible?

The signs, he answered, I behold within;
without is naught but symbols of the signs.²²⁸

The whole story of the soul's quest for God is exquisitely described by Rumi in two simple verses:

I sought a soul in the sea,
and found a coral there;
beneath the foam for me,
an ocean was laid bare.

Into my heart's night,
along a narrow way,
I groped—and lo! the light,
an infinite land of day.²²⁹

It is stated in the Old Testament of the Bible that after God had created man, man made all the animals in the forest pass before him in obeisance, to show his supremacy over the entire creature world. Man is actually the king and ruler who has degraded himself by becoming a slave to his senses and passions. Rumi says:

The pure water has become hidden in mud:
the pure spirit has become bound in bodies.²³⁰

Says Sarmad:

Filled with greed and desire is all this world,
every heart here is sick with wanting gold –
so many are the sick, but so little the tonic of gold.

The Temple of God

This world is an old and weary house,
full of the sick and the suffering.

Rubai 32

The Goal and the Gains

We are the far and lofty goal
for which creation was designed.

Within the brain, that else were blind,
we are the vision's vital soul.

The vast circumference we see,
and all the world is like a ring.

Know then, beyond all questioning,
the impress of its soul is—we!

Omar Khayyam²³¹

People go about seeking happiness in all places except the one place where it is to be found. In the process of getting wealth, they only develop physical illness caused by excitement and rivalry; they suffer from high blood pressure, insomnia and heart disease. The same process is passed through in achieving power, honour and authority. They seek happiness in women or men, wine and festive revelries and find the reactions depressing—frustrating them physically, intellectually, morally, and above all, spiritually. Others seek solace in pilgrimages, fasts, and visits to holy places. Shams-i Tabriz writes:

O pilgrims, where are you going, where?
Come back, come back—the Beloved is here!
His presence blesses all your neighbourhood.

The Goal and the Gains

Why do you wander in the wilderness?
You who are seeking God—you are He!
You need not search, He is truly you.
Why do you seek what was never lost?
There is nothing else than you! Be not lost in doubt!²³²

Samarth Ramdas echoes the same verdict:

You have the cow
that yields whatever you desire in your house,
but you go about begging for buttermilk.²³³

You stand in front of the tree
that fulfils all desires
and yet carry the burden of pain.²³⁴

The Lord is absolutely close to you;
O pure mind, search and find this truth.
The association between you
and the Lord is unbreakable.
O mind, the separation you feel
is due to egoism—give it up.
Always and forever is God near you.²³⁵

The destiny of humankind has been exquisitely expressed
by James Rhodes:

That which thou art thou dreamest not; so vast
that lo! time present, time to be, time past,
are but the sepals of thy opening soul,
whose flower shall fill the universe at last.

The Temple of God

Thou ponderest on the moon, the stars, the sky,
why the winds gather, how the waters run,
but all too lightly deemest of thy Self
who art a thousand miracles in one.²³⁶

Even when a person is equipped with perfect health and wealth, intelligence, faithful friends and relations, and the modern scientific paraphernalia of happiness, he still finds himself dissatisfied, especially so when he sits quietly by himself and begins the quest for the why and wherefore of it all. Why are even such people discontented? Because the soul is miserable away from its home, wandering about in foreign lands. Modern psychologists have failed to discover the reason. C.G. Jung, a leading psychoanalyst, writes:

Among my patients from many countries, all of them educated persons, there is a considerable number who came to see me, not because they were suffering from a neurosis, but because they could find no meaning in life, or were torturing themselves with questions which neither present-day philosophy nor religion could answer.... I too had no answer to give.²³⁷

The English poet Shelley gives expression to the same feeling:

We look before and after,
and pine for what is not;
our sincerest laughter
with some pain is fraught;
our sweetest songs are those
that tell of saddest thought.²³⁸

This discontent arises from our missing the goal of life. Securing pleasures and worldly goods is not the goal of human life. God has meant it for a much higher purpose. This is not to state that we must abandon the world, neglect this body, our intelligence and culture. We must keep our body in a fit condition. It is through the vehicle of the body that we can offer devotion to the Lord. 'Use the noble and beautiful vase today—tomorrow it may break,' exhorts a rabbinical saying. Nor must we pamper it so much as to forget its real object and defeat its very purpose. 'He who increases his flesh,' according to another saying, 'only multiplies food for the worms.' In his monthly letter to his disciples in Bombay, Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh Ji used to exhort his disciples to participate in all the pure enjoyments of life—to eat good food and to keep themselves happy—but never to forget their daily devotion.

But the cynic may ask: "What is the object of all this? Where do I stand at the end of it all?" It is this 'I', the ego, that is the cause of all the trouble. Hence Sarmad advises:

Go beyond ego and be safe from wickedness –
How long will you remain a thorn?
Become a garden for a while.
Battle your tyrant of a mind fiercely.
I have warned you, friend,
become your own enemy.

Rubai 259

When an ordinary mortal attains Godhood—what more can he want? Even the happiness secured in the earlier stages of spiritual progress staggers the imagination. Dr Julian P. Johnson in *The Path of the Masters* quotes half a dozen extracts

from A. Poulain's *Mystic Experiences of Medieval Saints*. Regarding a mystic experience, Saint Francis Xavier says:

After the prayer I once found myself inundated by a vivid light....All the truths of human science, even those that I had not studied became manifest to me, by an infused knowledge....At the same time an interior voice said to me, "Such is human knowledge; of what use is it? It is I, it is my love that must be studied."²³⁹

Saint Ignatius's experience is thus narrated:

His mind was suddenly filled with a new and strange illumination.... Certain things pertaining to the mysteries of the faith, together with other truths of natural science were revealed to him....If all the spiritual light which his spirit had received from God up to that time when he was more than sixty years old could be collected into one, it seemed to him that all this knowledge could not equal what was at that moment conveyed to his soul.²⁴⁰

Regarding Saint Benedict, Dr Johnson records:

The world was gathered together before his eyes, yet were not the heaven and the earth drawn in any lesser form than they be of themselves, but the soul or the beholder was more enlarged.²⁴¹

All these spiritual experiences, however, were passing—there was no stability about them. It is only by concentration, practised under the guidance of living true Masters, that there is stability, reliability and steady advancement in mystic experience.



A Life of Devotion

Travel Light

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor
he that loveth abundance with increase.

Bible, *Ecclesiastes* 5:10

From contentment comes the attainment of the highest
happiness.

Patanjali²⁴²

It appears from his rubaiyat that Sarmad had to face a severe struggle to still the wave after wave of desires which assaulted his mind in the early stages of devotion. A number of his verses refer to this difficult battle. The mind that had been wandering for unknown ages could not be made to 'stand at attention' on command. Controlling the mind's desires is the most difficult task that faces a devotee.

The biblical story of the flood and Noah's ark, it is said, is a spiritual allegory. The flood is that of the passions. The ark is the Word. Even after taking refuge in the ark, Noah was

rocked to and fro by the tumultuous waves of water that had covered the entire earth—the vast waves of the mind's ambitions and desires. At long last the water and the waves subsided and Noah found himself on the top of Mount Ararat, his spiritual destination. Sarmad has referred to the powerful waves of greed, desires, ambitions and worldly plans and schemes:

Every moment I am trapped
in a hundred transgressions,
from morn to eve I am saddened by my desires.
I seek to release myself from this trap –
Destiny it may not be,
but I will make ceaseless effort.

Rubai 188

I am sad—I've been sowing seeds of desire
and picking a hundred burning flowers of sorrow.
Even a typhoon will not extinguish
this fire of desires I carry within me.

Rubai 193

He therefore counsels:

Sad, sad are your thoughts.
What gain from these endless desires,
why these wishes that consume the heart?
The thread of your life quivers with every breath –
How will you fare with your feeble will power?

Rubai 248

If you seek to be a friend to your Self,
then become an enemy of your self.

Thus be safe from the misfortune of worldly desires.

This cruel ego is a thorn that rends your heart –

Remove it and let the garden of your heart bloom.

Rubai 266

Other mystics also have had to wage a similar fight against the worldly desires that the mind generates. The intensity of the struggle is best realized, not in ordinary life, but when a person sits down to practise concentration. Then there is a hurricane of desires, blowing one after another, almost ceaselessly. To still this storm is the principle task in meditation. It is said that these desires arise from duality:

An ignorant heart is a dual heart. A dual heart makes for a dual world. A dual world breeds constant strife and war.

Mikhail Naimy²⁴³

But some people ask: "Why should God have created duality and all the misery arising therefrom?" The reply of Mikhail Naimy is that it is only by fighting duality and reaching unity that a person might attain Godhood:

Not a punishment is Duality, but a process inherent in the nature of Unity and necessary for the unfolding of its divinity. How childish to think otherwise! How childish to believe that so stupendous a process can be made to run its course in three score years and ten, or even in three score millions of years! Is it a small matter to become God?...Long is the course of Duality; and foolish are they who would measure it with calendars. Eternity counts not the revolutions of stars.²⁴⁴

The mind is a baffling phenomenon. It creates greed upon greed—confusing and conflicting, but always meant to keep us tied down to the world. A variety of desires often arises at the same time. The mind knows from experience that their fulfilment will not give permanent happiness, but it still pursues them in a manner that evokes the pity and the sympathy of the wise:

Beware of the mind and its tricks. Those who obey the dictates of the mind flounder in the bog of illusion and never taste true happiness.

[The mind] is never satiated. The more it gets, the more it desires. It perfectly realizes that the reaction of all sense enjoyments is pain, sorrow and dejection, yet it persists in its silly pursuits.

Maharaj Jagat Singh²⁴⁵

Nature fulfils our desires, but not necessarily immediately. Most desires cannot be so fulfilled. But they are satisfied in some form at some time. And if the wishes are for the world, we are brought back here—not necessarily in the human body either, but in a body that will best satisfy our desires. Their fulfilment, however, only leaves us discontented; and thus frustrated, we create fresh desires:

If we love things of the world, we are drawn to the world.
If we love the Guru; who is the embodiment of the Shabd,
we are drawn towards the Shabd and our True Home.

Maharaj Charan Singh²⁴⁶

Our sufferings are the results of our own past actions. Further, these sufferings are for our own good and should be faced in that spirit.

Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

Bible, *Galatians* 6:7

With their own hands they write, and yet pretend,
and tell you falsely: This is writ by God.

Indeed, it is not writ by God at all.

*Qur'an*²⁴⁷

The Books say well, my Brothers! each man's life
the outcome of his former living is.

The bygone wrongs bring forth sorrows and woes;
the bygone right breeds bliss.

Sir Edwin Arnold²⁴⁸

When viewed from the level of the mind, it can be seen that we are responsible for all our actions and are the makers of our own destiny. Viewed from the highest spiritual level, however, it is discovered that the doer is always the Lord and that the body is a mere instrument. Rumi writes:

If we let fly an arrow, the action is not ours –
we are only the bow.

The shooter of the arrow is God.²⁴⁹

Nothing in this world is permanent. Change is the only permanent feature of worldly life. At the end of the First World War, aristocrats of Europe worked as cooks, butlers and

waiters in fashionable hotels. Kings, dictators and men of high authority were sent into exile or were imprisoned or beheaded. Even now in peaceful countries the wealthy become pauperized, the strong are crippled, the brains of the intellectuals lose their function, artists lose the cunning of their hands, singers lose their voices, and an attack of smallpox may permanently disfigure an idol of film fans. It is a passing show:

I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.

Bible, *Ecclesiastes* 10:7

For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation?

Bible, *Proverbs* 27:24

Saints and seers have always advised the rich and the mighty not to put their trust in their high positions. The Bible exhorts:

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

Bible, *I Timothy* 6:17

He that trusteth in his riches shall fall.

Bible, *Proverbs* 11:28

Sarmad observes:

To dust have returned all your dear ones –
All are bound fast to the saddle of Death
whose hunting ground is this life.

Though the glory of some may be high as the skies
all must return to dust in the end.

Rubai 87

The framework of a person's destiny is fixed; nothing can alter it. Omar Khayyam says:

None shall diminish by one whit
the portion wherewith thou art fed;
and none augment thy daily bread,
since God Himself determined it.

Omar Khayyam²⁵⁰

Whatever free will we have is meant to be spent in devotion. If it is exercised in coveting others' wealth, or trying to get it by bribery, corruption, vice or villainy, we only add to the load on our back, which is already back-breaking. The Bible speaks of contentment:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That

A Life of Devotion

even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Bible, *Matthew* 6:25-29

Sarmad tells us that contentment is necessary for devotees of God to achieve their purpose:

If you want to achieve your goal and avoid bitterness,
if you want to have peace and no regret,
be patient and make contentment a habit.
You are struggling because of desires and greed.

Rubai 302

The seeker should adhere to truth, contentment and mercy. This is the basis of all spiritual practice. With contentment, a person is satisfied with his own state of poverty, even while he sees others prospering:

With the coming of contentment, his desires vanish. All blessings come and reside where there is contentment.

Maharaj Sawan Singh²⁵¹

The day of reckoning is not far off. We carry our own record with us. Every fibre of our being gives evidence against us, yet we only hear the sentence immediately after our death. The only way out of this wheel of tragedy is to seek riches more permanent and freedom more lasting by surrendering ourselves to God. Sarmad says:

Cities and countries, hills and forests,
all are worthless.

Travel Light

Fair to the sight or ugly, all are worthless.

Come, let go of everything
and surrender yourself to God.

All your desires for the world and religion
are worthless.

Rubai 71

The higher path requires us to travel light. The heavier the burden, the more difficult is the journey. Sarmad advises:

Befriend detachment for a breath,
lay down your heavy load—become light.

By the time you open your eyes to life
you will have to close them again.

Wake up to yourself, O unconscious friend!

Rubai 256

It is no wonder that Christ exhorted a rich young man who wanted to follow him to dispose of his property first. Another story tells of Shah Ibrahim Adham, the king of Bokhara, who was in search of God. He lived in such luxury that he slept on a bed of fragrant flowers. One night when he was lying on his bed he heard noises above his bedroom and, on investigation, saw two men roaming on the palace roof. "What are you doing here?" asked the king.

"Searching for our lost camels," they replied.

"How could you ever expect to find camels on the top of a palace?" asked the king.

"In the same way you are trying to realize God in your bed of flowers," was the reply.

This reply greatly shocked the king and completely changed his way of thinking. The king then abandoned his palace in

search of God and eventually came to meet the great saint Kabir in his thatched hut in Varanasi.²⁵²

Why do saints advise us to travel light? Because our possessions possess us far more than we possess them. We buy a farm and are worried about rain, frost, insect pests, bad crops, falling prices. We buy buildings, and tenants harass us. We are worried about taxes, repairs, whitewashing, painting. We buy a new car and are disturbed to the core at the first minor accident. However, as Mikhail Naimy points out:

Less possessing—less possessed.

More possessing—more possessed.

More possessed—less assessed.

Less possessed—more assessed.²⁵³

When all desires are abandoned, then comes the grace of the Master, and the spirit travels at the speed of lightning:

The whole creation is engaged in feverish and senseless pursuits.... We shed plenty of tears for money, wife and children, and suffer agony and anguish through loss of them. But if we were to weep earnestly for God for only one day, we would surely attain Him.

Maharaj Jagat Singh²⁵⁴

Chaste Living

Fire tempers steel, and temptation the just man.

We often do not know what we can bear,

but temptation reveals our true nature.

Thomas à Kempis²⁵⁵

By the establishment of continence is achieved attainment
of vigour.

Patanjali²⁵⁶

Sarmad cautions against excessive passion in any form. Most of his rubaiyat on this subject are addressed to himself; saints sometimes address themselves when they wish to exhort their readers to do or not to do a thing. They are free not only from the lower passions, but from the temptations of the entire creation. Paltu says that he trembles at the sight of an old lady of eighty,²⁵⁷ but this simply means that the novice on the path should always be alert lest he fall because of an unexpected temptation. Serious attempts at self-control quickly expose our weaknesses. Sarmad says:

Strange are the ways of passion –

As I grew old my sins became young.

The flowers of desire have blossomed in autumn,
and rose-cheeked beauties have made me childish.

One moment I am pious,

the next moment rebellious, full of sin.

Rubai 234

The alluring sweetness of sexual passion has caused the fall of the great and the mighty. Vishwamitra, Rishyasringa (generally known as Shringi Rishi) and other sages of old were smashed to bits under its dominance, even after penances of thousands of years—penances that were heroic in their patience and endurance. King Solomon's kingdom was brought to ruin because of his lust. God gave only ten commandments to the children of Israel and one of them enjoined:

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."²⁵⁸ The biblical condemnation of licentiousness is forceful:

This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Bible, *Galatians* 5:16, 17

Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. But whosoever committeth adultery...destroyeth his own soul.

Bible, *Proverbs* 6:27, 28, 29, 32

From the viewpoint of spiritual progress, over-indulgence in sex is degrading. Real courage is required to conquer it:

To overcome kam [lust] and krodh [anger] is real bravery. It is not a small achievement. So many rishis and munis* of old lost the battle....

There is a considerable amount of dissipation of energy. Nobody feels happier after the act of dissipation. That act is a happy act if it leaves you happier.

Maharaj Sawan Singh²⁵⁹

* rishi: one who sees within, an enlightened one, a seer; a sage who has attained enlightenment through spiritual discipline; muni: a silent sage, a holy man; one who hears or experiences within.

To lead a good, pure, moral life in youth needs the courage, bravery and resolve of a prophet.

Maharaj Jagat Singh²⁶⁰

The power of the Word is dissipated at the centre of sexual energy in the body. The object of a devotee is to draw this power up. Spiritual practice would be impossible without self-control:

Nam and kam (lust) cannot exist together. They are antagonistic to each other as light is to darkness. Where there is kam, Nam does not enter. And when Nam comes, kam vanishes.

Maharaj Jagat Singh²⁶¹

It is as impossible for one who, after securing the nectar of Nam, still pursues the path of passions to become immortal as it is for a person who extracts and swallows the juice of poisonous roots and expects to escape death. But what can you do with fools? They will not stop drinking the poison of passion.

Jnaneshwar²⁶²

It may be asked if the spiritual path requires us to remain celibate. Far from it: the Masters generally advise initiates to lead a normal householder's life. They counsel moderation—total suppression may have negative reactions, seriously hampering spiritual progress.

It is not the physical so much as the mental attitude that determines the course of the soul and the power of the Word to uplift the soul. The late Dr B.R. Ambedkar, a former law

minister of the government of India and the architect of India's constitution, once said that if physical celibacy could accomplish it, thousands of castrated horses and bullocks would have gone to heaven. Thousands of individuals observe physical celibacy. At least two great religions lay special stress on it. Those who have advocated celibacy have meant it both in the physical and mental sense, but as in other matters the injunction is observed in the letter only. Few can observe it in spirit. Mikhail Naimy says:

Not celibates are they who wear monastic garb and shut themselves away behind thick walls and massive iron gates. Many a monk and nun is lewder than the lewdest, though their flesh swears—and very truthfully—that it never communed with another flesh. But celibates are they whose hearts and minds are celibate, whether they be in cloisters or in public marts.²⁶³

Adultery is considered a great sin. It is an act of faithlessness and treachery through which people have been wandering away from their Creator for ages. Faithfulness and loyalty are fundamental virtues. Adultery constitutes an assault on those virtues. For a devotee to over-indulge in sex is like trying to run in two opposite directions at the same time—a physical and spiritual impossibility. One facing both ways may make a successful politician; but in matters spiritual, he invites calamity.

Circumcise the Heart

And circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter.

Bible, *Romans 2:29*

Circumcise the Heart

The saints do not boast of their own merits; they ascribe no goodness to themselves, but all to Me, for I gave them everything out of my boundless love... The higher they stand in glory, the more humble are the saints in themselves, and closer they are to Me, and better loved.

Thomas à Kempis²⁶⁴

Egotism has wreaked more havoc in the world than perhaps any other human passion. Pride leads a person through untold miseries and hardships, and generates rivalry and hatred. Pride of family, dynasty or tribe has started blood feuds that have been carried on for generations. National pride has led people into war after war. In contrast, study the utter humility of Sarmad:

What is most useless? What is it? It is me.

The palm tree that bears no fruit is me.

I myself have pondered and calculated:

That mere speck of dust, of no account, is me.

Rubai 182

This is the abode of pride,
and false glory rules here.

But there is a different presence

in the tunes of those who are broken –

Dark stones are crushed to give collyrium,
to clarify vision.

Rubai 19

What is egotism? It is the idea in the minds of people that they are separate from God and can become little 'godlings'.

It makes them imagine that they can do and undo things according to their own will and pleasure. The feeling that 'this is my property, my family, my mills and factories, my office, my profession and my house'—this is egotism. We can use these things; they are meant for our use. But we cannot possess them. No one can take away with him anything from this world when he dies.

If people could take earthly things away with them, by now nothing would have been left in the world. Conquerors have come who wanted to rule the world, but they have gone away empty-handed. It is said that at the time of his death Alexander the Great ordered that his hands should be left hanging open outside of his coffin, so that the world might know that he went away empty-handed.²⁶⁵ All of us want to be little godlings.

Human beings wreak havoc in the world, throw overboard morality, principles and kind-heartedness, and commit beastly crimes and inhumanities to achieve fame. And what is the worth of the fame?

Trust not, O prince, to the vagaries of fame...As well engrave a name upon the sands of the seashore as print it on the lips of men. The wind and tide will wash it off the sand.

Mikhail Naimy²⁶⁶

Sarmad advises:

Name and fame you seek all through life,
like the royal seal etched on a ring.
Even as you gasp on your death-bed
you are longing to fulfil your desires.

Circumcise the Heart

Gather provisions from the storehouse of life,
glean at least one ear of corn —
Harvest time has come and still you are unripe.

Rubai 148

The 'I' in the entire human race has been its undoing.
We continue repeating the same follies life after life, until by
the grace of the Lord we are brought to the feet of a Master.
All scriptures lay emphasis on humility as the greatest virtue.
It is an offering to God far more valuable than any sacrifices,
rituals or pilgrimages:

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a
contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise.

Bible, *Psalms* 51:17

I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of
God more than burnt offerings.

Bible, *Hosea* 6:6

Mystics consider circumcision, which is enjoined in the
Old Testament and the Qur'an, a symbolic ceremony that pro-
vides a lifelong reminder to cultivate humility. Jewish prophets
give greater emphasis to the circumcision of the heart rather
than to physical circumcision:

Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the
foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants
of Jerusalem.

Bible, *Jeremiah* 4:4

Some think it was egotism that prevented Moses from entering the Promised Land. Gandhiji used to say that the Promised Land refers to the higher spiritual regions, not a narrow strip of land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. The world pays a heavy price for its egotism. The authority achieved by egotism stands on a precarious perch, and all the weapons of fright and terror are often used to prevent it from toppling down:

All the worldly authority, whatever its source, is counterfeit. Therefore, it clicks its spurs, and brandishes the sword, and rides in boisterous pomp and glittering ceremony that none may dare look into its false heart. Its shaky throne it mounts on guns and spears.

Mikhail Naimy²⁶⁷

A large amount of ill feeling, bad blood, strained relations, even among ordinary people, is due to lust for petty authority. Naimy continues:

Because of their lust for authority men are in constant turmoil; those in authority are ever fighting to maintain it. Those out of authority are ever struggling to snatch it from the hands of those who hold it, while man, the God in swaddling bands, is trampled under foot and hoof and left on the field of battle unnoticed, untended and unloved.²⁶⁸

Egotism brings ruination to ourselves. We are all the time busy finding fault with others. We delight in discovering others' physical deficiencies, intellectual inadequacies and

moral lapses. Slandering others is the main theme of many people's small talk. Saints explain that we take over the sins of those whom we slander. Could there be a greater folly? We condemn others, while we ourselves stand condemned. Sarmad advises:

My friend, whenever you want to look for vices
or even to recount the virtues of others,
review your own faults and study your own record.
Observe yourself—this indeed is virtue.

Rubai 127

We are proud of our youth, health and beauty—forgetting the Provider who gave them to us. We are proud of our intellectual achievements and professional successes. From where do they come? If they are in an individual's hands, why does the intellectual's intellect suddenly collapse? Why does a prosperous lawyer or doctor unexpectedly find his clients and patients vanishing? Successes are so transient, so much outside our control. They are God's gifts, and He takes them back when He likes. They are apparel in which we strut about for a time. The honours they bring us are only fig leaves that cover our spiritual nakedness. It is not that we should abandon physical, intellectual and professional achievement. The Masters say, Use all the powers that God gives you, but do not be proud of them; they are not yours.

A person pursuing spiritual advancement has to sacrifice himself to reach the goal. Sarmad says:

Unless you become nothing,
you will not be shown the road to Being.

A Life of Devotion

One who is weak of will is not granted this status –
unless you set out to burn like a candle
you will not be shown the Light.

Rubai 126

Maharaj Jagat Singh says:

Whoever wishes to tread the path of devotion has essentially to fulfil certain conditions. He has to rise above position, prestige and social status; has to turn a deaf ear to slander, criticism and ridicule; and he has to completely ignore calumny, taunts and the censure of society.

He throws to the winds all worldly name and fame, and likewise all rites and rituals. At the altar of devotion to Nam does he obtain real knowledge. Priceless is the Name.²⁶⁹

The spiritual path demands the constant practice of humility:

How did the great rivers and seas
get their kingship over the hundred lesser streams?
Through the merit of being lower than they;
that was how they got their kingship.

*Tao Te Ching*²⁷⁰

Samarth Ramdas advises:

O mind, develop courage, the highest virtue.
O mind, submit to slander.²⁷¹

Circumcise the Heart

He who has swallowed a fly with his food can have no taste for his food. In the same way, he who suffers from egoism cannot retain spiritual accomplishment.²⁷²

In the development of humility, devotion to the Word is supreme over all other practices. Austerities and penances, while bringing some spiritual benefit, heighten egotism as well. This egotism was responsible for the fall of many a sage and seer in ancient times. Devotion to the Word generates humility; hearing its sound and seeing its light act as poison to the ego. The Masters tell their disciples to look upon themselves as beneath all others:

Nothing else should come in the mind except 'I am nothing'....in pain or pleasure, in good or bad, in honour and pride, at no time [should] any thought of the self intrude into the mind.

Baba Jaimal Singh²⁷³

One who practises humility before all created things brings Infinity under his control.

Tukaram²⁷⁴

Humility is not a matter of bending knees and bowing low. A person may bend and bow before authority all his life while still being insolent and unbearable to his subordinates. Real and lasting humility which nothing can shake is established when one has tasted the Wine of love divine.

Finally comes the question of why egoism and other evils came into existence at all. This question has baffled philosophers and thinkers throughout the ages. The answer of the Masters is simple:

If a garment is already neat and well-stitched,
how can the tailor exhibit his skill?
If there were no sick and infirm,
how could the excellence of the doctor's art be seen?
Were there no base copper in the crucible,
how could the Alchemist prove his Elixir?

Rumi²⁷⁵

Vanity of Vanities

O precious soul, why do you remain ignorant?
You should know how long you will last here.
In vain are you proud of this unreal existence –
A guest here for two, three breaths,
you will not live here forever.

Rubai 284

Desire is at the core of individual man:
As is the strongest wish, such is the will;
as is the real will, such is the act;
as is the act, such doth become the man.

*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*²⁷⁶

Sarmad passed through many vicissitudes during his life. It is clear from his rubaiyat that as an international trader he amassed a great deal of wealth and then abandoned it all in search of God, embracing poverty. He was welcomed by the rich and honoured in the palaces of kings, and then he was persecuted by religious organizations and priests. If any man saw the uselessness of all worldly activity, it was Sarmad. He wrote:

Vanity of Vanities

Why should one love glory,
wasting one's life to gain such an end?
Why do we need to glow like a gem
when we are only to suffer death and indignity?

Rubai 247

Be not proud of your wealth and property –
Do not rejoice in this intoxication.
No difference exists between gain and loss;
neither rejoice at one, nor mourn over the other.

Rubai 261

Sarmad, who had had wide experience of worldly ambition, denounced it as a product of vanity and preached complete contentment. Our pleasures are not only transitory but are themselves mixed with pain:

Even if God grants us what we most desire in this world,
even then the feeling of loneliness does not leave us. Even
our sweetest songs end on a sad note.

Maharaj Charan Singh²⁷⁷

Happiness on earth is but a fleet
and passing ghost,
which man craves at any cost in gold or time.
And when the phantom becomes the Reality,
man soon wearies of it.

The secret of the heart is encased in sorrow,
and only in sorrow is found our joy.

Kahlil Gibran²⁷⁸

Sarmad had seen that all worldly wealth and honour are mirages and writings upon the water. He had seen, as in the words of Shakespeare, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."²⁷⁹ Maharaj Charan Singh says that everyone plays his part here, some as kings and heroes, others as villains, bodyguards, servants and slaves. When they leave the stage, however, there are no kings nor villains.

Life is like an empty dream. There is nothing real about it.

Maharaj Jagat Singh²⁸⁰

The One remains, the many change and pass:
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly.
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
stains the white radiance of Eternity
until death tramples it to fragments.

Percy Bysshe Shelley²⁸¹

Space is but a mode of our human sense; so likewise time. There is no space and no time. We are like—we know not what—light sparkles...floating in the ether of Deity! This so solid-seeming world, after all, were but an air-image, our 'me' the only reality; and nature...the "phantasy of our dream".

Thomas Carlyle²⁸²

The average person seeks stability. The one place where he cannot get it is in this world. People struggle through youth in the hope of having a secure and peaceful time in middle age. When they reach middle age, they feel that old age will

fulfil the hopes of their youth and middle age. At the end, if we are wise enough, we will agree with King Solomon who said, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."²⁸³

Saints say that one's destiny is fixed and settled even before the body is formed. Any worldly gain not written in this destiny is impossible. Worse, the attempt to acquire more involves a fierce struggle and the sacrifice of principles, and the gain itself is poisonous:

Thou passest all thy life away
on worldly interest intent,
not heeding the predicament
of that tremendous Final Day.

Come to thyself at last, my friend;
look all around, consider well
what others in their day befell,
and how Time served them in the end.

Omar Khayyam²⁸⁴

Wise men and women have compared this world to a way-side inn or caravanserai where all types of people meet, take their meal, sleep for the night and disperse the next morning. How can any thinking person look upon such a place as a permanent abode and spend all his thought, time and energy on such a mere stopgap affair? It is folly to do so:

This ancient hostelry, which those
may call the world who have the knack,
a stable is, where the poor hack
of dawn and sunset take repose.

Here Jamshid once high revel kept,*
but now the feast is bare of him.
Bahram here hunted at his whim,†
and here at last forever slept.

Omar Khayyam²⁸⁵

In this temporary abode where the majority of people live not even for the biblical three-score and ten, we meet with successes and failures. For successes we give credit to ourselves—our intelligence, ability, skill, diplomacy, cleverness. For failures we blame everybody around us. We hate our rivals, our so-called enemies; we slander them for our failures. Masters tell us that the only enemy that a person has is his own mind, which creates endless desires, ambitions and plans, and generates all the passions. Our principal duty is to establish victory over it by devotion to the Name of the Lord. Sarmad counsels:

My friend, the happiest person
is one who always keeps the Lord in his thoughts.
Both his beginning and end are good.
Don't be too attached to this world, I tell you,
moderation in everything is best.

Rubai 66

When we have strength, health and beauty, we take credit for it. Then comes sickness and these qualities disappear, and

* Jamshid: a mythological Persian king who possessed a special cup in which he could see all things past and future.

† Bahram: a King of Persia famed for his beauty and his valour in battle and hunting.

Vanity of Vanities

we blame the people around us, the health authorities, the government or the Lord. We get honour, accumulate wealth, achieve social position, secure applause in public life—we take credit. But when these vanish we become bitter, resentful, discontented. How did we allow them to vanish if they were within our power to obtain?

The trials and difficulties of life—not the successes—mould our character. Successes only inflate our ego. Failures may have two opposite effects. They may create despair and bitterness, or they may turn us towards the Lord, and that is the best thing that can happen:

Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

Bible, *Ecclesiastes* 7:3

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction. For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

Bible, *Proverbs* 3:11, 12

In pain, too, you should continue doing bhajan, and not forget it, because pain and pleasure are both the same. In pleasure, the mind keeps wandering; but when it is in pain, it does not go anywhere. It does not then wish for any worldly, sensual, or wicked desires.

Baba Jaimal Singh²⁸⁶

In the race of life, as King Solomon says, it is not the swift who always win, nor are the most intelligent always at the top:

A Life of Devotion

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,
neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of
understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill.

Bible, *Ecclesiastes* 9:11

The dull-witted may become first-class doctors, engineers or officials in government, while people with intelligence may serve as clerks. Why feel discontented about it? Saints say that one's destiny is fixed and settled even before the body is formed. Whatever is destined is therefore bound to happen, and it is best to surrender to the will of God. Why entertain hatred, resentment and spite?

Nor need we be jealous of the wealthy—we are saved from exposure to much temptation. The less burden we have on our back, the more free are we to devote ourselves to our main duty:

He who has hoarded most
will suffer the heaviest loss.

Be content with what you have, and are,
and no one can despoil you.

*Tao Te Ching*²⁸⁷

In olden days the rabbis considered it contemptible to receive money for the service of the Lord, and many faced serious difficulties as a consequence. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092–1167) was such a failure in business that he once said, "If I were a dealer in shrouds, no one would die as long as I lived. If my business were in candles, the sun would not set until I died."²⁸⁸

Living on charity gravely interferes with spiritual progress, especially if the charity comes from some ill-gotten source. Legend has it that a well-known faqir travelling from village to village decided once to stay with an aged woman weaver who was also a devotee. After a few days he experienced hindrance in his inward progress, and the next day he told the old woman about it and decided to leave.

The woman told him that her food was purchased with hard-earned money and that he should continue to stay. In the evening the old woman lit a feeble lamp and continued her weaving. The faqir was watching this. Her next-door neighbour was a prostitute, who a little later in the evening lit a blazing lamp. It shed light into the room of the old woman, who then put out her feeble lamp and continued her weaving in the bright light. "That brighter light is poison to me," said the faqir, and left the house the next morning.

We may abandon the world, but we cannot run away from our own mind and passions. They follow us wherever we go, even in the most secluded places. The supreme lesson is that whatever is destined is bound to happen—destiny is the product of our own past actions—and it is best to surrender to the will of God. Sarmad writes:

Surrender the end of the string of your will
into the hand of the Friend –
gain release from endless pain and sorrow.
This dear life, so filled with cravings,
now spend with the Friend,
rather than in negligence.

Rubai 131

Our principal duty is to seek release from this torture house of illusion. We shall have to account for everything we do here. Baba Jaimal Singh says:

When free, do not waste time uselessly, because our breaths, morsels of food, walking, working, sleeping and waking are all taken into account.²⁸⁹

The question still remains as to why this universe of vanities was created at all. The Old Testament provides a reply. It states that God took six days to create the world, and at the end of the sixth day it is recorded:

And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.

Bible, *Genesis* 1:31

This may seem amazing in the face of the appalling amount of cruelty, injustice, sickness, poverty, tyranny, oppression, exploitation and insecurity which we see everywhere. However, this viewpoint is superficial. At the end of their spiritual journey, legend has it, devotees are asked by the Lord to survey the entire creation and make any changes they like, and every devotee comes back with the conviction that no improvement can be made in it. The highest wisdom lies in submission to divine wisdom.

On Social Life

Those who are alive and yet dead to the world,
they alone can dive into the sea of pearls.

On Social Life

He who defies death ceases to suffer,
but he who only watches from the shore
gets not a farthing.

Pritamdas²⁹⁰

Banish your misery and leave all things of substance,
for society is naught but clamour and woe and strife.
She is but the web of the spider, the tunnel of the mole.

Kahlil Gibran²⁹¹

Sarmad seems to have had a great amount of experience of the social life of his day. It was not of the same type, perhaps, as the social life of today. Those were spacious days, and people were much more concerned with dignity and rectitude than now. Today, the social whirl has become a craze. Visits and revisits with friends and business acquaintances, tea parties, breakfasts, lunches and dinners, dances and cabaret shows—days and months and years pass away in this frivolity. Who are these friends and business acquaintances? Why keep up with the Joneses? For what purpose should we climb the social ladder, which is so unsteady, so unreal? Sarmad knew the significance of such a social life inside out when he wrote:

Friendships in this world are based on a loaf of bread;
none have I seen who love from their soul.
Like dogs they run from door to door for a morsel,
and this they call friendship and support.

Rubai 101

The West has a mania for a fast-paced social life. The East is now imitating the West with a zeal worthy of a better object.

But there is a reason for the social whirl. In the midst of plenty and behind all the glitter and outward merry-making lies deep discontent, abiding poverty of principles, the dethronement of character and desolation of the spirit. The social whirl is an escape from this cancerous disease:

In the mouth of society are many diseased teeth decayed to the bones of the jaws. But the society makes no effort to have them extracted and be rid of the affliction. It contents itself with gold fillings. Many are the dentists who treat the decayed tooth of the society with glittering gold.

Numerous are those who yield to the enticements of such reformers, and pain, sickness and death are their lot.

Kahlil Gibran²⁹²

A crowd is not necessarily good company, and in the midst of all social activity many have the subconscious feeling of loneliness. We see through the artificiality, the make-believe and the insincerity of it all, and the spirit is dissatisfied. Watch the crowds coming out of an entertainment hall and you will find exhaustion written on many faces. They come out enervated and dissipated instead of being refreshed and enlivened. They have gone there to get something, but find it missing. When at last, after the many ups and downs of life, we no longer participate in the social whirl, when friends begin to vanish and social climbers turn away their faces, then we realize:

Alas! We are all lonely in this world, even in the midst of friends and the pomp and show of the world. Only we do not realize it. When we meet with failures and disappointments, then we realize our loneliness.

Maharaj Charan Singh²⁹³

On Social Life

The fact is that we have no real friends here and none that go with us when we at last take the ferry for the other shore. Friends gather around us to show themselves off intellectually and socially. It is ego working most of the time, making a display of cleverness, of humour that has no joy, or fun that is sordid and sorrow-stricken. Wise men favour keeping only a few friends, if any:

Of those today that living are,
better it is few friends to make;
right good it were for thee to take
their company—from very far!

That self-same friend on whom below,
thou dost most faithfully rely,
if thou wilt open reason's eye,
is proved thy direst, deadliest foe.

Omar Khayyam²⁹⁴

When it comes to a real test, even the friendship of those who seem to be so kind, sympathetic, benevolent and sincere often proves to be of little value:

I have seen all—the good and the bad,
I have plucked the roses and the thorns.
As gold is tested on the touchstone,
so have I tested them
on the touchstone of experience
and discovered their worth—all are useless.

Rubai 7

A Life of Devotion

The kindness of the people is but an empty shell
containing no gem or precious pearl....

And kindness is too often a shield,
and generosity too often a sword.

Kahlil Gibran²⁹⁵

Saints urge the choice of right friends. The friendship of those who are in the grip of passion, anger or greed is ruinous:

Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.

Bible, *Proverbs* 22:24, 25

Solitude, as much of it as possible, is best calculated to advance the principal task of a devotee. In the social whirl the mind takes an outward and downward turn, instead of being concentrated for the inward and upward path:

Mixing with people brings us down to the path of the mind.
It is the Path of the Master which we seek to follow.

Maharaj Jagat Singh²⁹⁶

Sarmad writes:

Oh my friend! Choose a corner of seclusion
to enjoy the intensity of the Beloved's love.
Leave all grief and choose tranquillity.
Do not be scattered like the whirlwind –
Centre your heart on the Beloved
and choose peace.

Rubai 226

If you wish to shine like a brilliant gem,
shun the crowd and sit in solitude.

I have seen many lose themselves
in this wilderness –
in the cold selfishness of the world
and the heat of zealous religion.

Rubai 235

The type of conversation we participate in also influences us profoundly. If we talk about women and wine, racing and gambling, cutting each other's throats in business, or rivalry and spite, or if we indulge in slander and sarcasm, we cannot hope to do our devotion with success. The two actions run in opposite directions. In the social whirl we often must keep on talking all the time, without a moment's respite. Otherwise, we are considered to be dull. As saints and prophets say, however, the tongue must be kept under severe control:

Open your lips only when it is most necessary; and
when you must speak, do so in the most kind and gentle manner.

Maharaj Jagat Singh²⁹⁷

Every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and
of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed,
of mankind; But the tongue can no man tame; it is an
unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

Bible, *James* 3:7, 8

For an average person hard, sustained labour is required to earn an honest living. Accumulating wealth by honest means is an uphill task. And how do we spend it?

A life of luxury, of worldly power and authority,
rests on wealth and the favour of your boss.

See how you serve your superiors
to acquire this wealth, power and prestige!

So slavishly do you comply with their orders
that you forego food and sleep to please them.

But what do you do with the money thus earned?

You throw it around to gain social standing.

I have already made clear the state of this world –
after its short-lived allurements nothing remains.

I feel ashamed to disclose what servility
you endure for love of wealth.

Soami Ji²⁹⁸

Much of our hard-earned money is often spent on the social whirl, which, far from developing culture, often tends to brutalize the heart. The etiquette and culture of the world and all its courtesies and good behaviour are really very superficial. Righteousness exalts a person, but the social whirl often degrades one. The way out, as Maharaj Charan Singh says, is to keep miles away from so-called social life. While men of the world keep on chattering, saints make the minimum use of speech. They teach without talking, commune without conversation, and remove doubts without discussion. The highest wisdom is conveyed in silence.

An interesting Jewish legend tells of the presumably 'true amount' of love that exists on earth between people. Once, God heard a great deal of shouting and noise on the earth, and sent down the angel Gabriel to find the cause. Gabriel came back and told the Lord that everyone was discontented with their lot, and was calling out to the Lord to grant them

their prayers. The Lord told Gabriel to go down and declare that all their wishes would be fulfilled. He did so. After some months, God found that there was complete silence on this planet, so He sent Gabriel down to find the cause. Gabriel returned with a sad story:

"My Lord," he said, "most of the people are dead."

"Why?" asked the Lord.

"Because the Lord wanted their wishes to be granted, and they all wished for each other's death."

It is, of course, a symbolic tale, but with a deep meaning. It exposes the true worth of much of our social life.

Piety and Pretence

These preachers who display
such brilliance in the pulpit
behave in very different ways
when they retire into their private rooms.

Hafiz²⁹⁹

The thoughts of the mind are always known to the Lord.

Patanjali³⁰⁰

It may seem surprising that of all the people with whom Sarmad came into contact, it was the priests who persecuted him. But that has been the experience not only of saints, but also of others who dared differ from the orthodox teachings. Hindu and Muslim priests combined to make common cause against Kabir. Mansur was flayed alive at the instigation of qazis and mullahs; Shams-i Tabriz was said to have been flayed alive at their instigation. Persecution of the followers of one

religion by those of another occupies a prominent place in religious history. Even leaders of sects of the same religion persecute each other with a vengeance. The history of many Christian sects is soaked in blood.

Moses Maimonides, one of the most eminent Jews since the Prophet Moses, wore himself out in the service of his people. His hymns are sung even today on Sabbath days and festive occasions in synagogues throughout the world. But he was excommunicated by Jewish priests, who later joined hands with Christian priests to convince the Muslim government of Egypt to raid Jewish houses and publicly burn his book, *Guide to the Perplexed*. The prophets of Israel often fought single-handed battles with the entire priesthood aligned against them. Jeremiah was one man against the whole nation, and was, according to legend, murdered by the people whom he sought to serve.

Mystics have never hesitated to expose hypocrites and their utter ignorance of spiritual wisdom. Like Christ, Sarmad did not hesitate to expose the hypocrisy and false piety of the priestly class:

O sadhu, this woolen cloak of renunciation
under which you hide your hypocrisy
is a cunning disguise that harbours disaster.
Do not carry this burden on your shoulders,
so you won't have to bear the load
of a thousand sufferings.

Rubai 26

Criticism of the priesthood arises from their intolerance of those who depart from official dogma. Some priests claim the

last word on scriptures. The blind try to lead the blind, and those who do not know the path of salvation point it out to others. The word 'religion' means 'binding back' to God; the priests are incapable of doing this and some make up for their deficiency by juggling with words that confuse and confound their congregations. The lives of this type of priest expose their false piety, and their long sermons their emptiness.

The maulvi from the high turrets of the mosque proclaims that God is one; the Jewish rabbi announces it at every prayer; and the Christian clergymen thunder on the same theme from a thousand pulpits. On what basis can they make this proclamation? They have not seen God. And what amount of blood has been shed, how many millions of human beings—temples of God built by God himself—have been destroyed over this issue! People hope to reach the kingdom of heaven by merely proclaiming the Oneness.

Pretence plays a big role in this world. Righteousness is for public exhibition. Not many of those who preach virtue possess it, and the pretenders of piety are soaked in sin:

For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?

Bible, Job 27:8

Many religious organizations have accumulated great wealth and extensive property. They ask us to lay up our treasures in heaven, but they themselves go on accumulating treasures on earth. These create strong vested interests, and secure for the priests honour and position in society.

Often it is the priestly class that puts up the strongest opposition to people following saints who show the path of salvation. Every saint echoes Christ's denunciation:

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer; therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

Bible, *Matthew* 23:13-14

Saints advise us that even one's prayers should be made in secret, and that they should come from the heart. Formal prayers mechanically repeated have little value. The Hebrew word for prayer, *tefillah*, is derived from *pallel*, which means 'to judge'. The major part of Jewish prayers consists of self-judgement, turning the searchlight within. And that is as it should be. We do not know what to pray for, but are often careful to make a show of praying. Christ says:

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

Bible, *Matthew* 6:5

Mystics proclaim that there is no need to go to synagogues or temples—no need of ceremonies to go to the kingdom of heaven:

Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

Bible, *Jeremiah* 29:13

The 'merit' of counting beads, doing penances, reading scriptures, performing worship, and much more, is all attained by Nam bhakti [devotion]. "The elephant's foot includes all feet." Can there be a higher *jap* (recitation) than meditating on God and always having his Name in our mind? What greater *tap* (penance) can there be than surrendering ourselves unconditionally to his Will and accepting whatever comes—good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant—with cheerful resignation? What holier worship is there than to move about with the radiant form of Saints and Masters always with us? What nobler recitation of the scriptures can there be than keeping our inner attention day and night in Shabd? Can there be a more complete renunciation than the sublime non-attachment resulting from Shabd *abhyas*, the practice of Shabd?

Maharaj Charan Singh³⁰¹

How can the priesthood tolerate such preaching? It strikes at their profession, shakes their social position, and undermines the awe and reverence in which they are held. But no matter: who is bothered about the priests and their dogmas and theories when one goes beyond all this and reaches the stage described below?

For how much longer, so I asked my Lord,
my Lover and Beloved, my heart's own God –
for how much longer will you keep your face
close hid behind this screen?

Sure it is time that you unveil yourself
to your slave's eyes!

He said, "I ever am without a screen.

Do you see a screen? Then that screen is your self,
your separate and egoistic self!

While you are fixed in sense of separateness,

countless as living bodies are the veils

you fling over me, keeping me unseen!

Thy separatist small self itself is a screen!

My self is by the selfless ever seen."

Khawaja Muin-ud-Din Chisti³⁰²

What priest is normally capable of such language of love? Saints, not priests, show us the path, and they suffer untold misery for doing so. Fortunately, however, we are now living in more tolerant days. Religious persecution is less prevalent in the democratic nations, and saints and seekers pursue their path without political and military power being mobilized to buttress the priesthood. But dogmas still hold sway. The more civilized methods of the media, the platform and the pulpit are mobilized today—instead of the halter, the rack, the thumbscrew and the gunboat—to uphold dogmas and their champions.

The Outward Bound

They who are always praising Vedic rites and ceremonies, saying there is naught else worth thinking of, are very foolish.

Bhagavad Gita 2:42

Among the many accusations made against Sarmad, the most amazing was that he was an idolater. The priesthood, which was upset by his views on the formalism of religion,

looked for something to discredit him and thought of this charge as the best means to prejudice the Muslim mind. All Masters are against worship that spreads the mind outside instead of concentrating it within and allowing it to search for God within one's own body. A number of Sarmad's rubaiyat prove that he was not only against idol worship, but upheld only worship of the one Beloved:

The lover and the Beloved, the idol, the idol maker
and the imposter—they're all one.

In the Ka'aba, mosque and temple is the same
one Beloved.

If you come into this garden you will find one colour—
The lover and Beloved, the rose and thorn are one.

Rubai 54

Judaism, Christianity and Islam stand against idol worship. All religions believe in the oneness of God, and Hindu and Muslim (Sufi) saints have criticized idol worship as scathingly as all others. Kabir Sahib said, "If by worshipping a stone I could attain God-realization, I would worship an entire mountain. I would better worship a grinding stone: it at least supplies flour to the people."³⁰³ Other saints have also used strong language on the subject:

People worship any god they consider to be God. But
nobody searches for [the real] God. There are millions
of gods in this world. Everyone imagines his form of
worship is the best.

Samarth Ramdas³⁰⁴

Tukaram, Namdev, Chokha Mela, Narhari Sonar, Sena Nhavi, Guru Nanak and all the saints in his line and Soami Ji Maharaj wrote pages and pages denouncing idol worship.

It is said that Dayanand Saraswati, when a child, was taken by his mother to a temple to participate in a very long ceremony consisting of a sermon combined with choral and congregational singing. The programme went on till midnight. In the hurry to go back home his mother left Dayanand, who was fast asleep in the temple. At about one o'clock in the morning, when the child got up, he found rats running about on the head and body of the idol, and eating the sweets offered to it. The utter helplessness of the idol impressed Dayanand so much that he later gave his entire lifetime to conduct a campaign against idol worship.

Saints are opposed to ritual sacrifices. The burning of incense was meant in olden days to purify the atmosphere in the jungles before a person sat for meditation at some quiet place. Now, only the ritual remains and it serves no purpose. Ordinary humanitarianism is against the killing of any animal. Kabir Sahib, addressing Muslims, said, "The whole day you fast* and at night you slaughter cows. At one end you commit murder, at the other end you pray—how can God be pleased?"³⁰⁵ He also said, "All flesh is the same—meat, fish or fowl. Those who eat flesh, eyes open to the killing of animals, will go straight to hell."³⁰⁶ And further: "I declare and declare again, that he whose throat you cut will one day cut your throat."³⁰⁷

Other prophets too have spoken in strong terms against animal sacrifice, ritual and ceremony:

* During Ramazan, the month of fasting, Muslims do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset.

The Outward Bound

For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Bible, *Hosea* 6:6

Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Bible, *Micah* 6:6-8

It is not the sacrifice of others, but our own sacrifices—the sacrifice of desires, ambitions and passions, the sacrifice of one's time, money and energy—that is required for the higher path. Even physically we sometimes must sacrifice our comforts and luxuries, and face slander and calumny at the altar of devotion. We must keep awake for devotion when the world is fast asleep. Kabir says, "Why do you sleep such long hours? Wake up! Get up and remember the Name of the All-Merciful, for the day is not far when you will sleep the long sleep, your limbs stretched rigid in death."³⁰⁸ Again he says, "Why are you sleeping? Arise, weep and lament! How can anyone who resides in the graveyard of this world sleep in comfort?"³⁰⁹

Maharaj Jagat Singh says:

There is no gain without pain. The price of pleasure is pain. Gold you must dig out of a mine and for pearls you must dive into a deep sea. No child is born without

labour. What sacrifices does a man not make to achieve his objects of love! Then how do you expect to realize the Lord without paying the proper price for it?³¹⁰

Most religious rituals originally had a spiritual significance. But today that significance is lost, and only the form remains. Confirmation among Christians, the bar mitzvah among Jews and the thread ceremony among Hindus and Parsis are symbolic of a Master starting a lad on the spiritual path. To the empty shell that remains today saints attach no value:

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Bible, *Galatians* 6:15

Rites, religion, hatha yoga,* reading the scriptures or renunciation—none of them is any use to achieve the direct experience of God:

Vows, charities, religious observances and rites performed on their completion only make your path difficult.

Samarth Ramdas³¹¹

Many have great faith in bathing in holy rivers and visiting holy places. How did these places become holy? In ages past, sages, seers and saints lived and spent years there in devotion to the Lord. Visits to these places were meant to inspire others to follow this example. But today nobody practises such devotion

* hatha yoga: a form of yoga in which emphasis is laid on physical discipline and exercises including breath control. Its objective is to transform the human body to make it a worthy vehicle for self-realization.

at these places. Concentration is impossible when river banks and temple grounds are turned into open-air bazaars, fancy fairs with merry-go-rounds, ferris wheels, and sweetmeat and toy shops for the delectation of the crowd. They are turned into health propaganda centres, and from the political platforms erected there microphones blare out political ideologies. What room can be left for the Lord in this 'madding' crowd?

Not that these places are not holy. They have been made holy by people who suffered privation, hunger, thirst and mental agony in waging war against themselves, their passions and their worldly desires in order to attain Godhood. It is recorded by his daughter that when Rasputin, a Russian monk who came to exert great influence over Tsar Nicholas II, visited Palestine, he could locate with his spiritual sight every place in Jerusalem and on the shores of the sea of Galilee where Jesus Christ had walked; and at every such place he kneeled down and wept most bitterly.

Much the same is the story told regarding Shiva: Once when he was wandering through a forest, it is said that he saw a big boulder and bent down and wept. "What is this about?" asked his wife Parvati. "Ten thousand years ago a Master sat on this stone, and if I had been fortunate enough to meet him then," he said, "I would have been rescued from the horrors of rebirth."

These places are holy only for those who have the eyes to see. For others they are meaningless. Kabir says that if merely by bathing in holy rivers one could get salvation, thousands of frogs would have attained Godhood.³¹² He says that it is no use bathing in holy rivers if the filth of the mind is not washed off.³¹³ Guru Nanak says that you can wash a soiled piece of cloth with water, and if it is very dirty, soap cleans it.

But for cleansing the mind and soul, the power of the Word or Name of God is required.³¹⁴

It is the nature of the mind to remain attached to one thing or another all the time; it cannot remain empty and unattached. It can be detached from the world only if it is attached to something more fascinating than what the world offers. Physical renunciation is useless unless the mind is detached from earthly affairs.

Both renunciation and attachment pertain to the mind.

Outward forms and symbols have nothing to do with them. Enter this garden of the world. Take a walk in it.

Enjoy the fragrance of the flowers. Eat fruits and behold the beauties of Nature, but do not get entangled in thorns and prickly shrubs, lest you get abrasions and wounds.

Maharaj Jagat Singh³¹⁵

On the Lure of Learning

Gather no more knowledge, O friend!

This worldly knowledge is worth nothing.

All that you need to know is *alif*.*

Life is fleeting, its end uncertain, take heed —

Gather no more knowledge, O friend!

You read and read, and pile up a heap;

the Qur'an and other books lie all around you.

All around you is light, but within you is darkness.

* *alif*: the first letter of the Arabic, Persian and Urdu alphabets; here it signifies the One.

On the Lure of Learning

Without the guide there can be no knowledge –
Gather no more knowledge, my friend.

Bulleh Shah³¹⁶

Many spend an entire lifetime in the study of holy books and commentaries, and works on ethics, theology and philosophy in the hope of finding spiritual satisfaction. Long discussions and debates are held for the same purpose. But nothing practical comes out of it all. Sarmad, in the early stages of his quest, made a study of many scriptures, and it was his scholarship that attracted the attention of Dara, heir apparent to the throne of Delhi. But Sarmad knew that human beings long for something that cannot be found through the reading of books:

Sad and anguished are people of the world,
many are insane, few are awake.

Rubai 94

Even 2,500 years ago when there were no printing presses, when all writing was on parchment and every copy of a book was made by hand, King Solomon said:

Of making many books there is no end; and much study
is a weariness of the flesh.

Bible, *Ecclesiastes* 12:12

That in fact is the opinion of all saints. Books are useful only as a guide. The actual spiritual journey must be made by every individual himself, according to the instructions of a Master. Books cannot do the journeying for us:

Numerous books have been written on instrumental music such as that of the vina, the guitar or the flute. But no one can become a master performer by reading these books. Similarly, spirituality cannot be acquired without practice and without the guidance of a living Master.

Maharaj Sawan Singh³¹⁷

The Vedas, the Shastras and the eighteen Puranas –

The conclusion of them all is this:

Surrender yourself to God,

and with profound faith repeat his Name regularly.

Tukaram³¹⁸

Neither by the knowledge of anatomy,

nor by the study of logic;

neither by the study of music,

nor by the various yogas,

nor yet by asceticism –

but only in the company of saints

can you get satisfaction.

Samarth Ramdas³¹⁹

It is said that King Janak, who was in search of God, once invited all the men of learning to his kingdom to debate in his presence the nature and attributes of God and how one could see Him. All the learned men, theologians and philosophers gathered to indulge in long-winded arguments for days together, each making an exhibition of his pride of learning, his insolence towards others, his intolerance of contrary views and his petty-mindedness and folly.

On the Lure of Learning

Then, when the king was in a despondent mood at finding no answers, a Master came to his court. He seemed to be anything but learned, and the grand assembly laughed when he undertook to show reality to the king. He asked the king to sit cross-legged on the ground. He then connected his consciousness with the Word, and the king's soul, already so strongly desirous of God, rose up at once into the spiritual world. Then his soul was brought back. King Janak was now satisfied. Discussions and the reading of books do not take us along the higher journey:

The philosopher kills himself with thinking.

Let him think on in vain,

for he has turned his back to the treasure.

Most of those destined for paradise are simpletons,

And thus they escape the mischief of philosophy.

Rumi³²⁰

An entire lifetime is not sufficient for research into all the different Shastras, and at the end the disease of doubts and suspicions is only intensified.

Samarth Ramdas³²¹

This does not mean that we should not read holy books. Reading them is useful. They point to the path, the difficulties to be faced, the opposition to be encountered, the war against passions to be waged. But books do not remove the difficulties; they simply point them out. They do not clear away the opposition; we have to encounter it ourselves. They do not fight our passions; we have to fight them ourselves. The books tell us of the existence of God; they do not take

us to Him. They tell us of the need for a Master, but we have to search for him ourselves. They tell us of the importance of the practice of the Word, but do not connect us to it. They do not accompany us during the journey; the Masters do this. Books arouse our interest and perhaps cleanse our minds for the time being, and they can give us emotional uplift. But nothing more.

The thoughts of saints are reduced to writing in the sacred books, but one cannot realize the Truth by merely reading these books. It is a matter of self-experience through the practice of meditation.

Maharaj Sawan Singh³²²

Grami writes of the power of the direct experience of love:

Can the crow imitate the nostalgic singing of the bulbul?
As a bloodless vessel cannot know the agony of the lancet
when applied to a robust arm, likewise the puritan cannot follow the working of the devotee's heart pining for the Beloved. What does Plato know of Majnun's pangs?
Approach Laila to learn the secret of love. It is one thing to sit in a wine shop and ask the price of the wine, and quite different to drink the wine and become intoxicated.³²³

The Beginning of Wisdom

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.... The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

Bible, *Proverbs* 1:7, 19:23

The Beginning of Wisdom

And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure.

Bible, *Isaiah* 33:6

From birth to death every living being is in the grip of fear. The Hindu scriptures call this world an ocean of dread. Nobody's life is safe here. In the waters the small fish are afraid of the bigger ones swallowing them, in the air the small birds are afraid of the bigger ones preying on them and on land one animal preys on another. Human beings prey on almost every living creature and themselves live in the grip of fear during much of their life. They are afraid of losing their health, their business, their spouse and children, their friends and relatives. They walk with wary feet when crossing the road lest they be run over by a car. They eat with caution lest they suffer from indigestion or get some disease. They fear demotion, dismissal, unemployment. They are afraid of their parents and teachers in early age, their bosses and officers in youth, and in old age they are afraid of its attendant woes and worries.

Fearlessness is an impossibility, a myth—nobody is fearless. Yet, as a part of their plan for freedom from fear for the human race, psychologists and others exhort us not to fear God. In reality fear of God—or awe of Him—is the only profitable fear. It brings about freedom from all other fears.

The fear of the Lord which prophets and saints advocate is not the fear that one has of an enemy. God is nobody's enemy. He is all love. When one does his devotion because of the fear that if he failed to do it he would be punished and worldly calamities would descend on him, he really looks upon the Lord as an enemy who must be pacified. Such devotion is

of an inferior type. It is fear of offending someone we love that is valuable. We are most careful in our conversation and behaviour towards our friends, lest we offend them. Yet we offend the Lord every minute and feel no concern about it. The fear of offending the Lord is true wisdom and leads to love for the Lord.

Guru Nanak says that without fear of the Lord none can cross the ocean of the world. This fear adorns our love for Him. Fear of the Lord is food, drink and mainstay for those following the Guru. Without fear of the Lord, the fools perish.³²⁴

The scriptures of all religions exhort us to fear God and to be conscious of our sins:

Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God: him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name....Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.

Bible, *Deuteronomy* 10:20, 13:4

Great importance is given to fear for progress on the spiritual path. Fear acts as a whip for the achievement of the ideal of spiritual practice, and the devotee tries to improve himself and become worthy of following the spiritual path.

Maharaj Sawan Singh³²⁵

Fear of the Lord is the first step towards spiritual progress. The majority of us are prevented from behaving worse than we do because of fear of divine punishment. Churches, temples, mosques and synagogues are crowded with people who attend prayer services consciously or unconsciously driven by that fear.

The Beginning of Wisdom

It is better to attend them and return thus to the Lord, than to seek to drown the world's worries and disasters in intoxicating drinks, in opium, or indulgence in other escapist activities.

Every step that a person takes in seeking God's help is a beneficial step. Prayer is the first step. Not that every prayer is answered—most prayers are not, because destiny is fixed and we pray for things that harm us spiritually. But the Lord values beyond measure the humility that prayer generates. Prayer is the most efficacious means for getting the Lord's grace and mercy. Sarmad prays:

O God, pray save me from this whirlpool of life,
take my boat across the ocean of sin to safety's shore.
If my sins are countless, your mercy is limitless too –
Strange, but true, no one can reckon this account.

Rubai 137

O Lord, innumerable sins have I committed –
What am I to do?
Pray save the worn boat of my heart from this whirlpool,
I am drowning in a sea of shame and remorse.
Only your mercy can bring me to shore.

Rubai 140

Prayer does not require temples, mosques or churches—we can pray anywhere. It is the attitude that matters. Formal prayers do not, broadly speaking, come from the heart. Concentration is next to impossible in congregational prayers. Prayer must come from the core of the heart to be of any spiritual value. Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

So long as every word of our prayer does not arouse all our feelings from the core of our hearts, we can derive very little benefit.

Prayer does not require any religious place. All that is needed is deep, heartfelt sincerity. The entire earth is a religious place. God pervades everywhere.

At every step he [a devotee] is a beggar for the Lord's help and grace, for there are so many things that are beyond the reach of our labour and efforts. The seeking of this help is called *praarthana* (prayer).³²⁶

Rabbi Hillel was a renowned teacher. When he was still young, his classrooms used to be crowded and even included old men. At the end of his lectures students would surround him to have an opportunity for personal discussion, and it is said that every day after a short discussion he would disappear from the crowd and say (referring to his soul):

I must hurry home to a guest I have been rather neglecting of late; a guest who is here today and gone tomorrow.³²⁷

When Rabbi Jochanan was on his deathbed, his pupils visited him and asked him for a blessing. With his dying breath the Rabbi said: "I pray that you may fear God as you fear man."

"What?" exclaimed the pupils. "Should we not fear God more than man?"

"I should be well content," replied the Rabbi, "if your actions proved that you feared so much. When you do wrong you first

see that no human eyes see you; show the same fear of God, who sees everywhere and everything and at all times.”³²⁸

Fear of the Lord leads to repentance. Those who have no such fear can have no repentance. We believe that no one can question us about what we do, but, in truth, for every thought and action we will be held responsible. Repentance cleanses the heart. Prophets and saints put it in clear language:

Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Bible, *Luke* 13:3

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

Bible, *Acts* 3:19

The best prayers often have had their origin in fear, sorrow or suffering. Even the best literature and acts of charity and benevolence are sometimes the products of fear. At least some hospitals, orphanages and widows' homes are built because of someone's fear and repentance—though undoubtedly some are simply monuments of self-glorification.

Prophets and saints hold that the best time for prayer, as well as mystic meditation, is before daybreak when silence prevails and one is free from worries. For others that is the best period for sleep after midnight revelry. According to a rabbinical parable the cock and the owl both await daylight, but for different reasons:

“The light,” says the cock, “brings me delight; but what in the world are you waiting for?”

“So that I may slumber,” says the owl.

Man's duty is to fight against his evil tendencies—evil thoughts, speech and actions—and to run to God for help when in difficulties. When difficulties lead us to rebel against God, their most valuable purpose is lost. When they make us run to the Lord for help they become a blessing. Only those who fear the Lord do so.

Such happenings come to us as a warning to set us thinking as to the transitory nature of our existence here; that we also shall have to leave it one day.

Maharaj Charan Singh³²⁹

When the heart is cleansed by prayer and repentance and finally by worship of the Name of God, it becomes a fit place for the Lord to live in:

You cannot expect a king to enter a filthy cabin. Even a dog does not sit in an unclean place. How can you expect God to enter a heart that is full of the passions of lust, anger, greed, attachment and pride or egotism?

Maharaj Jagat Singh³³⁰

It is when the heart is cleansed that love is developed, and one can sing with Ibrahim Ben Adham, Prince of Balkh-Bokhara:

O God, you know that paradise
weighs not with me so much as the wing of a gnat.

If you befriend me by your recollection,
sustain me with your love
and make it easy for me to obey You,
then give paradise to whomsoever you will.³³¹

The Miracle of Love

Neither fear of punishment nor hope of paradise, but pure love for the Lord must be the power that finally drives us to devotion, even as it was with Sarmad.

The Miracle of Love

When I love my servant I am the hearing with which he hears, the seeing with which he sees, the hand with which he strikes and the feet with which he walks. Were he to ask something of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant it to him.

Hadith³³²

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

Bible, *I Corinthians* 2:9

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."³³³ So exhorts the Old Testament. "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also."³³⁴ So says the New Testament. Is it possible for us to put these injunctions into practice in actual worldly life? The very idea seems to be fantastic. Some explain these commands away as ideals that are never reached, but which may be steadily kept before us.

Saints assert that these are not impractical ideals, but goals that every person can reach by certain spiritual practices. Mere

exhortation, however, cannot create love so permanent, so unwavering, so transcendent.

We can love only what we see with our eyes. We cannot love or worship (which is another word for love) the Lord, because he cannot be seen by our physical eyes or grasped by intellectual conception. In actual life, love for the Lord is a fiction. We love ourselves and our kith and kin, we love our profession or trade, intellectuals love their favourite field of learning and scientists love their sciences. And above all, the worship of the golden calf flourishes unabated. Things of the world we love with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul. We 'cleave' to them, and not to the Lord. We are proud of being worshippers of one God and denounce idol worship, but we only delude ourselves. All of us are idol worshippers. We worship the things created, not the Creator.

God is spirit, and the only form in which he can be worshipped is in spirit. Christ emphasized this many times. God's first revelation is the Word, which is spiritual light and sound. Even the Word cannot be seen by the physical eyes, but a true Master is "the Word made flesh",³³⁵ Saint John tells us, and he can be seen with our eyes and heard with our ears. If we love and devote ourselves to him we will be attached to him, and since he is himself God revealed, we will become attached to the Lord. This is a proposition that is not difficult to understand.

Mystic literature stresses the fact that between the true Master and the Lord there is no difference. "I and my Father are one,"³³⁶ said Christ. Sarmad declares:

He and I are one,

like the word and its meaning.

Behold union in separation,

like the eye and vision.

Not for a moment is He separate from me –
Behold us together everywhere,
like flower and fragrance.

Rubai 145

The Persian word for God is 'Khuda'—the One who comes himself to take his children back. Some mystics go so far as to say that from the point of view of our salvation, a true Master is of greater practical importance than the Lord himself, because he, as "the Word made flesh", takes us back to the Lord. And it is only a living Master who can do this. "As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world,"³³⁷ said Christ. And so does every Master emphasize the need for a contemporary Guru or Master.

How are we to revere the Master? Are we to keep on praying to him day and night? We generally pray for what is poisonous to our spiritual progress, and the Masters never administer poison. Are we, then, to fall at the feet of the Master? They do not allow us even to touch their feet. Are we to give them money and other gifts? They will not accept even a brass farthing.

Devotion to the Masters includes:

1. Hearing their discourses (satsangs) and having their darshan.*

* darshan: Sight, vision, having a glimpse of someone; looking at someone with admiration, love and reverence. Outer darshan is looking at someone with such absorption that one forgets himself and loses his sense of separate existence from the object of darshan. The darshan that elevates the soul to spheres of higher consciousness is inner darshan, the darshan of the Radiant Form of the Master or the Lord of a high spiritual region within. This darshan is attained through a process of deep inner contemplation.

2. Practising meditation: devotion of the Word by concentration of the mind according to the instructions of the Master.
3. Reading spiritual literature and hearing spiritual discourses of the disciples of true Masters—this is meant only to keep the mind clean and remind us of our duty to do our early morning devotion.

The darshan and discourses of the Master and devotion to the Word generate divine love. Love of the Master attaches us to the Master, and since the Master is attached to the Lord or is the Lord himself, we are also attached to the Lord.

Maharaj Sawan Singh says, "Love is the true prayer to the Lord."³³⁸ He further says:

All austerities, worship, knowledge and contemplation are useless without love, and a practitioner without love remains devoid of any knowledge of God's mysteries....

Various paths have been prescribed for meeting the Lord, viz., repetition, austerity, devotion, detachment, knowledge, yoga, etc., but love is supreme and is the very life of all methods. It is only the touch of love in all these observances that enables the devotee to meet the Lord....

That eye is very fortunate through which pearls of tears are shed in remembrance of the Beloved. That heart is blessed which is being burned in the fire of separation from the Beloved, because the tear drops from the eyes, falling on the ground of the heart, are responsible for bringing forth the blossoms of the mysteries of God.³³⁹

The Miracle of Love

Sarmad writes:

The pain of love has turned this heart to dust –
Now hold fast to the thread of eternal life.
Should you seek the good fortune
of his kisses and embraces,
then even for a moment
do not part from your Friend.

Rubai 139

Above all there must be complete surrender of one's will to the will of the Master. One must face the ups and downs of life without the slightest complaint:

True love does not mean possessiveness, but complete and unconditional surrender to his Will.

Maharaj Charan Singh³⁴⁰

The love between husband and wife, parents and children, friends and classmates, is mere gutter water compared with love divine. Worldly love is mixed with selfishness, greed, egotism, and passions. It is unsteady and unreliable. The closest friends end up as the bitterest enemies, and one need not go to divorce courts to see the sad end of marital love. To generate divine love we have to give up earthly ambitions and attachments, love of honour, wealth and position, while still discharging our worldly duties.

Devotion to the Word brings about the intoxication of divine love. All the worldly pleasures then reveal themselves as mere folly, a waste of time and energy. Then begins the struggle—a keen and severe struggle, a painful but joyous

struggle—to be one with the Lord. The language of the divine lover's struggle is itself a joy to read. Sarmad writes:

In myriads of colours every second

He appears to you –

one moment all love and kindness,

the next moment cruel indifference.

Open your inner eye,

take him in your inner embrace,

there, where He can never leave you.

Rubai 15

He entreats:

O rose-cheeked Beauty,

silvery, slender and tall as a cypress,

come for a stroll in the garden—it is springtime.

Don't hide in your chamber like a budding flower,

that is cruel—the roses and jasmine will soon fade.

Rubai 245

My Beloved is cruel and hard-hearted,

I do not know where this will lead.

In days of loneliness

none but my shadow keeps me company,

but in this darkest of dark nights

even my shadow deserts me –

I stand alone in sorrow.

Rubai 246

The problem of sin simply does not arise at this level of devotion. All sins are washed clean by worship of the Lord when

The Miracle of Love

we taste pure divine love. The struggle for detachment from the world is also over. Who bothers about gathering dirt and filth when one is given precious stones? The language of love is far different from the language of pulpits and platforms:

Cast me into hell? His goodness forbids, but if He does cast me into hell I shall have two arms to embrace Him, one arm in true humility that I should lay beneath Him and be thereby united to his holy humanity. And with the right hand of love which is united with his holy Divinity, I should so embrace Him that He would have to go to hell with me. And I would rather be in hell and have God, than in Heaven and have no God.

Meister Eckhart³⁴¹

Divine love has nothing to do with the fear of hell or the joys of paradise. It is pure love for the Lord himself, without a trace of any selfish desire. That love is not a bargaining counter. Rabia Basri, the famous Muslim woman saint from Basra, Iraq, implores:

Oh, my Lord, if I worship thee from fear of hell,
burn me in hell;

And if I worship thee from hope of paradise,
exclude me from paradise;

And if I worship thee for thine own sake,
then withhold not from me thy eternal beauty.³⁴²

Mira Bai, a disciple of the shoemaker saint, Ravidas, has written some of the most beautiful of all poems on divine love. King Akbar, the Muslim Emperor of India, seeing her devotional ecstasy, fell at the feet of this Hindu Queen. She wrote:

A Life of Devotion

O black vultures, eat away everything
of this flesh—but discriminately –
Only leave these two eyes,
for they still hope to see the Lord.
O black vultures, pull out these eyes as well
and take them to his presence.
Only make an offering of them to the Lord
before you devour them.³⁴³

Sarmad also reached the stage where he forgot himself, his body, and his separate existence:

I have been annihilated and do not know
what existence is.

I have become a blaze and do not know what smoke is.

I have surrendered my heart, soul and faith.

I have struck a bargain, but I do not know
what profit is.

Rubai 68

Rumi compares himself to a reed pipe that has been torn away from its abode with the Lord. He describes its yearning to go back home thus:

Hearken to this reed forlorn,
breathing, ever since 'twas torn
from its rushy bed, a strain
of impassioned love and pain:

"The secret of my song, though near,
none can see and none can hear.

In the Wine Shop

Oh, for a Friend to know the sign,
and mingle all his soul with mine!

'Tis the flame of love that fired me,
'tis the wine of love that inspired me.
Would you learn how lovers bleed,
hearken, hearken to the reed."³⁴⁴

It was from the high pinnacle of divine love that Christ, addressing the Roman soldiers who came to crucify him, said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."³⁴⁵ It was from that pinnacle that Sarmad, when he saw the executioner approaching, saw God in him and said, "In whatever disguise You may come, I recognize You."³⁴⁶ It was from that height that Saint Mansur declared that he was one with God, for which he was executed. Indeed, when his eyes were put out during his execution, Hazrat Mansur is said to have declared: "That is no great matter, since those eyes were impermanent, and I have eyes that are able to see the Lord forever."³⁴⁷ That is the miracle of divine love.

In the Wine Shop

They are drunken, but not with wine: they stagger, but
not with strong drink.

Bible, *Isaiah* 29:9

* Rumi uses the reed flute as a metaphor for the soul emptied of self and filled with the divine spirit. This soul, during its sojourn on earth, always recalls the union with God which it originally enjoyed and longs ardently to go back to Him.

Sarmad refers to the Word as Wine, and to the Master as the Wineserver or Cupbearer. The wine shop or tavern refers to the inner spiritual centres, and also to the presence of the Master within or at his gatherings (satsangs). It is only when this is understood that his rubaiyat—like the rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, the *Masnavi* of Jalaluddin Rumi, and the *Song of Solomon*—can be properly interpreted. Rumi says:

Endeavour to gain spiritual grace
from God's cup of love;
then you will become selfless
and free from your own will.

Then all choices will belong to that Wine,
and you will be absolutely excusable,
like a drunken man.³⁴⁸

Much misunderstanding has been created and high spiritual teachings have been degraded when these mystic poems are represented as having been written by drunkards. Omar Khayyam is often represented as a lover of women and wine, and those who revel in the enjoyments of both of these worldly pleasures contribute to the amazing popularity of his work.

The devotees of saints are asked to call upon the Name of the Lord at night, particularly before daybreak, and many imagine this activity to be a drunken revelry. It is, however, a very different type of intoxication. Sarmad writes:

Where there's a Cup of rose Wine in a blooming garden,
that is our homeland, the dwelling of a happy heart.
True, if you call me a drunkard,
but false if you call me a pious renunciant.

Rubai 27

In the Wine Shop

O my friend, do not be friendless in this Tavern,
do not be without the rose-faced Wineserver.
The all-revealing Cup is not given to everyone,
do not be indifferent to this great good fortune.

Rubai 159

Devotion, or in mystic language 'entering the wine shop' in the very early hours of the morning, has been insisted on by all of the Masters:

The head which does not bow in devotion to his Master in the early hours of the morning is useless.... To sleep during this time is nothing short of a sin.... Whoever is awake in devotion at that time becomes wealthy, for the wealth of the sound current can be received by the devotee almost gratuitously.

Maharaj Sawan Singh³⁴⁹

God distributes musk at night.

Those who are asleep cannot receive that gift.

Baba Farid³⁵⁰

The Song of Solomon not only compares divine love to wine, but the love between the Lord and the devotee is pictured as that between man and woman. It speaks of eating, drinking and gathering spices and myrrh—all material things, but here employed in a spiritual sense:

I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O, friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

Bible, *Song of Solomon* 5:1

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth:
I sought him but I found him not. I will rise now, and
go about the city in the streets and in the broad ways I
will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but
I found him not.

Bible, *Song of Solomon* 3:1, 2

Isaiah employs a similar comparison of bride and bridegroom in the soul's love for the Lord:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful
in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of
salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments,
and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Bible, *Isaiah* 61:10

At a certain stage, a devotee will be able to repeat the Name of the Lord every moment. The devotee only wants to stay in the 'tavern' and never go back to the world. Sarmad writes:

Because of God's resplendent grace

I am ever comforted –

Even plain barley bread keeps me content.

I neither fear this world nor worry about the other.

In the corner of the tavern I am tranquil and free.

Rubai 195

Omar Khayyam calls upon people to drink only the wine of divine love. The 'everlasting' fountain is the fountain of the Word:

In the Wine Shop

I bid thee drink no other wine
but this, the everlasting fount:
A fortune of delight to count,
in this brief hour of the world is thine.

Give not this precious heart of thine
save to the Loved One's lock, to bind:
Scatter not life upon the wind,
nor live one moment without wine.³⁵¹

The intoxication of ordinary liquor passes away after a few hours, but the intoxication of love divine is perpetual. In the following verses, Rumi uses the same figure of speech as Omar Khayyam and Sarmad:

The mortal body is a proof of the immortal spirit:
The wandering of the drunken reveller
proves the existence of the Cupbearer.³⁵²

When first the Giver of the grape
my lonely heart befriended,
wine quickened my heart and filled my veins.
But when my eye possessed his image,
a voice descended:
"Well done, O sovereign Wine and peerless Cup!"³⁵³

It is surprising that the West should misunderstand the use of the word 'wine' in its spiritual sense. Christian mystics have used it in that sense: Francisco de Osuna (1497–1541) said, "The soul is wholly transformed in Him and tastes abundantly

of his sweetness, in which it sleeps as in a wine-cellar; and keeps silence, because it desires nothing more."³⁵⁴

At Jewish congregational prayers the rabbi sips from a glass of wine or grape juice. He then pours out what remains into a large bowl and distributes it to members of the congregation. The Zohar interprets this as being symbolic of the spiritual wine. In churches of a number of denominations a similar ceremony is performed on certain occasions—the priest sips from a goblet and then passes it round the congregation, and every member takes a sip from it. Incidentally, some Westerners who object to the distribution of parshad (food blessed by a guru) may well remember this ceremony which is performed in their churches.

Mira Bai, who was anything but a drunkard, also speaks of the intoxication of the divine nectar. She says:

The Name of the Lord is veritably
like a drop of nectar;
in my mouth it has the taste
of a precious gift from heaven.
I am intoxicated with the sweetness of the Name.
My Guru told me the greatness of the Name;
today I have experienced its power.³⁵⁵

Medical science has proven that alcoholic drinks first affect the moral and intellectual qualities such as mercy, sense of justice, fellow-feeling and benevolence—qualities which, according to the theory of evolution, humankind developed last in the process of evolution. Liquor brutalizes a person. The divine Wine, however, gives him the highest bliss, and ultimately makes him one with God. The two belong to opposite poles.

Victory over Death

Victory over Death

He that heareth my word, and believeth in him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Bible, *John* 5:24

Die before your death!

Whoever dies before his death

gets relief from the world of sorrow.

Whoever flies out of the universe

gets delivered from the universe.

Hadith³⁵⁶

Death is the reality of life here. The rich and the poor, the peasant and the king, the great and the mighty are all subject to it. A rabbinical saying reminds us: Many a colt's skin is fashioned to make the saddle which its own mother bears. Says Sarmad:

Death is hard on your trail in this wilderness –

the end of you and all that you amass.

Suffering at the beginning, regret at the end,

and in the end your attachments trample you.

Rubai 14

This body is founded upon a hundred woes,

like dry grass set on fire it is burnt in a moment.

* The phrase "die before your death" (*mootu qabla an tamootu*), quoted in *Masnavi Maulana Rum*, VI:84, is much quoted by Sufi mystics such as Rumi, Attar and Sana'i. It is from the Hadith, a collection of sayings attributed to Muhammad.

From the snare of Death there is no escape –
You are the prey, here to meet the hunter.

Rubai 57

Death the leveller recognizes no distinctions. It levies such a heavy toll that hardly an inch of earth is left anywhere where someone or another has not been buried or burnt:

The clay says to the potter: "O potter,
why do you trample me under your foot?
One day I shall trample you under my foot."

Kabir³⁵⁷

Omar Khayyam uses similar language:

Consider how yon potters lay
rough hands upon the fragile earth.
If they had sense and reason worth
the craft wherewith they shape their clay,
never would they so punch and pound
and kick the stuff that is their skill –
their fathers' dust, deserving still
their love and reverence profound.³⁵⁸

Death is surrounded with mystery. How is death caused? What happens to one's mind and soul—where do they go? Do they come back here in another form? Do they go to heaven or hell immediately? Where is the 'judgement seat'? No one knows the answer. The time of death is so uncertain—one cannot be sure even of the next breath.

Victory over Death

But truly as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.

Bible, *I Samuel* 20:3

Many a person in the best of health has passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. Of course, doctors attribute reasons—heart failure, congestion of the lungs or some other cause. But saints explain that every person is allotted a certain number of breaths, a certain quantity of food and clothing, a fixed amount of honour and dishonour, health and ill health. These are fixed. Beyond these he has only a limited amount of freedom of thought and action. The moment the allotted number of breaths is over, the soul leaves the body.

The pain through which a person passes at the time of death is most excruciating. While one is alive, the power of the soul and mind is enmeshed in every tissue. The mind itself is deeply attached to the world, and the messenger of death, who is no messenger of mercy, drags both mind and soul from the body with utter ruthlessness. It is said that the stinging of a thousand scorpions would be but a flea bite compared with the agony of death.

All distinctions of class, race, religion, wealth and learning disappear when one dies. The emperor of a mighty kingdom, an industrial magnate, a politician, a scholar—they are all on the same level as the poorest and the most illiterate:

As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.

Bible, *Ecclesiastes* 5:15

No one escapes death.

When one person dies, another laments.

Then suddenly the lamenter himself is snatched away.

Samarth Ramdas³⁵⁹

All the pomp and honour to which the great are accustomed on this earth are non-existent after death. Red carpets are not rolled out at the gates of death on the arrival of state dignitaries; guards of honour do not wait on army commanders; nor do sirens blow, or cavalcades or motorcades follow their Excellencies. Even the humble office superintendent does not find any clerks and peons there to say, "Yes, Sir, certainly, Sir." Nor is there any friend or relative to say, "How are you? Come over to my place and have some coffee. You are so shaken up." No social pleasantries are there, and no one asks, "How is everyone at home? Is John still mischievous? Has Daisy got married?" Our ego is pounded to pulp.

Owners of Rolls Royces and Cadillacs have to trudge barefooted, as much as the humblest beggar, to reach the 'judgement seat'. Our good and bad deeds and thoughts are separated there, and reward is given for the former and payment required for the latter. This should be an eye-opener to those who indulge in bribery and corruption, bloodthirsty exploitation of labour, or usurious money-lending—and who hope to get away with it all by building a temple here and an orphanage there and contributing to public funds. No such balancing can be done. Fasting, prayers and austerities that run counter to the conduct of a lifetime are of little avail. In former times, a certain religious leader, on being given payments of cash, used to give notes which were placed in coffins allotting suitable places in heaven for the deceased; and the

larger the amount the better the place allotted. But no such notes are of any avail. The recognized seal is that of a true Master stamped on the forehead of the disciple. Near him not even the messengers of death dare appear.

Prophets and saints warn us to keep the day of death before us in all our thoughts and actions. Sarmad cautions:

O friend, wake up!

You are asleep, unaware of yourself.

This negligence will bear no fruit but regret.

All your companions have gone

and you too are on your way,

but you won't reflect on your illusory existence.

Rubai 319

The story is told of a rabbi who once told his students, "Repent the day before your death." The students said, "No one knows the day of his death."

"Consider every day your last day," replied the Rabbi.

At the time of death our entire life—everything we have done, every thought we have thought—passes before us like a film shown on a screen. We are aghast at our own record, frightened and terrified by our misuse of the world. We are also terrified for a more serious reason. According to saints, a child in its mother's womb, hanging head down and feet up and suffocated by its surroundings, continuously repeats the promise to the Lord that it will remember his Name with every breath if only it is rescued from that agony. It promises that it will give, even in the worst of times, at least a tenth of its time to devotion and a tenth of its earnings to Him. That is the origin of the custom of tithing in Judaism, Islam and

Christianity. But as soon as the child is freed from that agony, it forgets its promise and leads a life of faithlessness. It pays a heavy price for this. It is born in agony, lives in agony, and ultimately dies in agony.

Saints who have seen all of this say that the record of good and bad deeds is carried in each soul's account; no separate scribe is needed. Many paradises and hells exist for reward and reform—all scriptures say so. Vivid descriptions of them are given. Everyone likes to believe in paradise, and no one likes to believe in hell. But it does not cease to exist because we do not like it. Masters tell us to get initiated and to go and see these things for ourselves. There is no need to debate, to get angry about the matter or to dispute about it.

After the period of reward or punishment is over, a person is sent to the place to which he was most attached, and is given a birth that will best satisfy his desires. We, in our ignorance, develop desires which, far from giving us happiness, leave us in misery. We then create another set of desires and find that their satisfaction gives us no happiness. And so it goes on for unknown ages until we reach the feet of the Master, who teaches us wherein real happiness lies. Meanwhile, the peacock satisfies his desire for glorious apparel, the locust his greed for food, and the ant hoards food and thus exhibits its lack of faith. The greedy moneylender and millionaire are no better. We are all fulfilling our desires. Mystics see all this and try to rescue us from this mad whirl:

Where will you go after death? You go to the place or the person on whom your thoughts have been dwelling all along. This is the verdict of our Shastras as well.

Maharaj Sawan Singh³⁶⁰

Victory over Death

Birth as a human being is the one window of escape from this wheel. That is why human beings are called the crown of creation. It is the one opportunity for the homeward journey:

O Dadu! One should die while living.

Everybody dies at the end of life's span.

Dadu Dayal³⁶¹

At the time of death everybody is helpless and the soul is forced to leave the body, the result of which is intense agony. Therefore Guru Nanak and all other saints say that at death we are forced to leave the body, so why not practise that yoga by which we can, with joy and free will, go to these regions beyond death during our lifetime....

The whole world is afraid of death, and everyone wishes to live. But the one who has practised concentration looks at life and death with the same frame of mind and achieves life everlasting by dying while living.

Maharaj Sawan Singh³⁶²

As against the agony through which a person passes at the time of death, there stands the story of those who surrender themselves to the Master. The Master teaches the disciples how to vacate the nine portals of the body and to withdraw the mind and soul, which are enmeshed in the body, to the eye centre while they are still alive—the process of dying. "I die daily," says Saint Paul. At the time of death the Master himself, instead of the messenger of death, comes to take his disciples and places them in a spiritual region from where they can best continue their upward journey. For them the day of death is their happiest day:

A Life of Devotion

About the 'mystery of death', a satsangi has no fear or any trouble about death. Rather, he eagerly waits for it with love. Those who have been regularly attending to their bhajan and simran are instantly taken to higher regions when they leave their bodies. The Master himself comes at the time of their death and takes them with him.

Maharaj Charan Singh³⁶³

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Bible, *Psalms* 23:4

The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.

Bible, *Psalms* 118:18

O you who are sincere,
if you want Reality unveiled,
choose death and tear off the veil –
not the death that takes you into the grave,
but the death that transforms you
and takes you into the Light.

Rumi³⁶⁴

The saints warn us that this life is meant for devotion to the Lord, that every day we are approaching death, and that we should use every possible moment for the central object of life, namely, God-realization:

We have never cared to think about what kind of journey lies beyond the Gates of Death. We lament the death of

Victory over Death

others. But actually we should be concerned with our own end, and should prepare ourselves for our own life beyond death.

Maharaj Sawan Singh³⁶⁵

Sarmad advises:

Do not rejoice in this perishable realm –
Whether king or beggar
you will not remain here forever.
In this drama of a few days, stay awake,
never for a breath forget the Friend.

Rubai 153

Disciples of true Masters are taught the practice of 'dying daily' to which Saint Paul refers in such clear language. Indian saints also speak of dying while living:

Perfect is the person who dies through the Name.
This is what true Guru, the hero, utters and proclaims.
Guru Amardas³⁶⁶

All die without exception, but few know how to die;
one who dies while living, O Paltu,
crosses life's ocean with ease.

Paltu³⁶⁷

Such disciples obtain victory over death. They no longer have to go to the grave again and again, and they can truly ask:

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?
Bible, *I Corinthians* 15:55

The tragedy is that we do not understand the transcendent destiny that the Lord has prepared for us:

Yet more enduring are you than the Earth, than the Sun and all the spheres in the heavens. All shall pass away, but you shall not.... Rub your eyes and be awake. For you are more than earth; your destiny is more than to live and die and to provide abundant food for the ever-hungry jaws of death. Your destiny is to be free from living and from dying; from Heaven and Hell and all the warring opposites incumbent on Duality. Your destiny is to be fruitful vines in the eternally fruitful vineyards of God.

Mikhail Naimy³⁶⁸

Part Three

The Rubaiyat of Sarmad

- 1 In life's experience of varied kinds, this have I seen:
Your grace, O Lord, far outweighs my sins.
Strange, your mercy has become my excuse
for more transgressions –
The greater your generosity, the greater my sins!
- 2 The web of earthly knots have I untangled,
relieving everyone of sorrow and suffering.
But true appreciation I've seen in none,
though I met all and tested them well.
- 3 O Beloved, in this field of experience
where good and bad hold sway,
You alone heard my cry and rescued me,
though I met all and tried them well.
- 4 O You who shimmer within,
lift the veil, reveal yourself!
I am lost in the realm of the mind,
searching for You.
I long to hold You close –
Oh, how long will You keep yourself concealed?
- 5 Others find happiness
in worldly gain and heavenly promise.
Pray spare me both – therein lies my happiness.
Ensnare me in your love, this is my desire!
Leave your veiled domain
and reveal your beauty.

- 6 You are renowned as the thief of hearts,
the glory of your friendship knows no parallel.
I am in love with this mystery of You –
You remain veiled,
yet your Light shines through all the creation.
- 7 I have seen all – the good and the bad,
I have plucked the roses and the thorns.
As gold is tested on the touchstone,
so have I tested them on the touchstone of experience
and discovered their worth – all are useless.
- 8 My heart searched for your fragrance
in the breeze moving at dawn,
my eyes searched for the flower of your face
in the garden of creation.
Neither could lead me to your abode –
Contemplation alone showed me the way.
- 9 You've made yourself famous for ravishing hearts,
for the art of friendship and kindness.
Vision is for beholding your glory –
Every moment You reveal yourself
in a thousand radiant disguises.
- 10 Whether you find cruelty and disloyalty
or roses, kindness, love and devotion,
do not give blame or credit
to yourself or others –
I tell you all is in his hands.

- 11 O Beloved, in your mercy forgive me my sins
and accept my night-long weeping.
I live in bewilderment, full of transgressions –
Only your grace will bring me release.
- 12 In gardens and meadows, in the company of friends,
an intoxication of words and wine was in the air.
But in the end these dear ones departed,
only their words remained –
This blue dome no longer allowed them to stay.
- 13 Surrender all your fruitless dreams, O heart,
abandon your futile thoughts and return!
Never hope for happiness in this world.
In this life neither the joy of union
nor those united remain –
Return!
- 14 Death is hard on your trail in this wilderness –
the end of you and all that you amass.
Suffering at the beginning, regret at the end,
and in the end your attachments trample you.
- 15 In myriads of colours every second
He appears to you –
one moment all love and kindness,
the next moment cruel indifference.
Open your inner eye,
take him in your inner embrace,
there, where He can never leave you.

- 16 Every moment and everywhere
I am aware that your grace and forgiveness
outweigh my transgressions.
From head to toe and with full measure
I am filled with sins and transgressions,
but my dark deeds cannot outdo your compassion.
- 17 If I am spiritual, this is an affair
between my Beloved and me.
I care not for the rosary or sacred thread.
The woolen cloak of renunciation
is burdened with a hundred hidden crimes –
This degradation I won't carry on my back.
- 18 Lechery and transgression are our daily routine,
our cup and bowl overflow with transgressions.
While our true self weeps,
this false world rejoices
at our pretentious prayers, fasts and devotion.
- 19 This is the abode of pride
and false glory rules here.
But there is a different presence
in the tunes of those who've been broken:
Dark stones are crushed to give collyrium,
to clarify vision.
- 20 Expect not a moment of peace from love of self,
expect no lofty position from lack of will.
Worldliness brings no profit –
Become insignificant, seek no increase.

- 21 Do not wonder
if He forgives without question
a life spent in ignorance and debauchery.
The One whose mercy and grace
far surpass his anger,
how could He calculate your trespasses?
- 22 O Sarmad, seek love from no one in this world –
Under a bare tree seek no shade.
Dignity comes from contentment,
and degradation from greed.
Be content with your dignity,
seek not degradation.
- 23 Ask for the ruby-coloured Wine
from the heavenly Cupbearer.
Ask for the cup of contentment and repose in your old age.
How long will you remain ensnared in the world?
Ask for divine mercy, for freedom from this net.
- 24 O tyrant ego, drowning in resentment,
a thousand blessings would come to you
if your heart were thankful.
This world is too small for all your desires.
Never content for a moment,
you never taste happiness.

- 25 Sarmad is a body whose soul
 is in the hand of someone else –
 an arrow shot from a bow held by someone else.
 He tried to become human to escape this cage,*
 but instead became a cow
 whose bridle is held by someone else.
- 26 O ascetic, this woolen cloak of renunciation
 under which you hide your hypocrisy
 is a cunning disguise that harbours disaster.
 Do not carry this burden on your shoulders,
 so you won't have to bear the load
 of a thousand sufferings.
- 27 Where there's a Cup of rose Wine in a blooming garden,
 that is our homeland, the dwelling of a happy heart.
 True, if you call me a drunkard,
 but false if you call me a pious renunciant.
- 28 Lovers of the world who long for wealth
 are too unkind to each other.
 Do not be afraid of scorpions and snakes,
 but fear those who are full of stings and poisons.
- 29 Drink this Wine, O pious one, it is righteous.
 You go around with that hangover because you wear
 the robe of pretentious abstinence
 that houses a hundred deceits.
 You call this Wine forbidden
 but perhaps it is the only lawful act –
 Whoever imbibes its qualities
 becomes him.

* in order to be free from the cycle of birth and death.

- 30 In days of youth it is good
to have passion for poetry and prose,
to love roses, wine and the wine seller.
In old age it is good to renounce the world,
to ceaselessly contemplate the other realm.
- 31 How foolish it is to desire wealth and glory,
these whims and worries are in vain.
In the house of this body you will never find a home,
all this wanting on a two days' journey is of no gain.
- 32 Filled with greed and desire is all this world,
every heart here is sick with wanting gold –
So many are the sick, but so little the tonic of gold.
This world is an old and weary house,
full of the sick and the suffering.
- 33 In this world of ecstasy I sing differently now.
Speak to me only of that fire
which burnt the bush on Sinai,*
for my mood is different now.
I am smitten by the Inner Reality,
my mind travels one path, and my soul another.

* Sarmad here refers to Moses, who, according to the Old Testament, was called to Mount Sinai, where the Beloved appeared to him in the form of a bush that burst into flames.

- 34 Those who forsake this Wine are fools,
they are beasts and not human beings.
This Wine awakens the pain of longing,
it rekindles the flame
lying dormant in every heart.
- 35 One who desires ever more
never attains to life's great goal.
Birds who leave the sky to look for bait
end up in cages.
Worldly possessions bring burdens and troubles,
the less one has the more peace one possesses.
- 36 Those who are possessed by desires and wants
will not be satisfied even if they are given a kingdom.
This thread of life is short – be wary, abandon
the traps and cages fashioned by your desires.
- 37 Those who looked with eyes of desire
at this garden of existence missed out.
Thorns and dead flowers they picked
and then departed.
This mask of creation is full of inner meaning –
Woe to those who did not grasp this,
and then departed.
- 38 Those with many desires and passions
live in pain, sick in the heart from greed.
Those whose eyes are hungry for the world never feel full.
Many such people have I seen everywhere.

- 39 Wherever there is longing for the Beloved
there is tranquillity –
Without this yearning life is not fulfilled.
Do not be heedless of the Beloved and the pure Wine.
If you are seeking great Jamshid's wealth,
it is in the cup.*
- 40 One who is blessed with ambition for perfection
should look for nothing but lessons everywhere.
Seek seclusion from the world,
be wary of its evil as well as its good.
- 41 To help someone in times of trouble is a fine deed,
a bargain in which you benefit more.
Do not miss this rare pearl of opportunity
in the stormy seas of this passing life.
- 42 The flame that colours the ruby of my heart
is the fire in the stone, the pearl in the depths.
He is the Thief within
but no one can see him –
Strange, how hidden is this luminous Reality!

* It is said that the legendary Persian King Jamshid gazed into a cup in which he was able to see and know everything in both the inner and outer worlds. So also the divine Wine gives knowledge and understanding of the entire creation. In Sufi lore, the cup of Jamshid (*jam-i Jamshid*) signifies success in every arena, spiritual as well as worldly. The cup may also symbolize the eye centre.

- 43 See how quickly sorrows and joys have passed,
 all that filled your thoughts has passed.
 Your only capital now is a few breaths –
 My friend, waste them not,
 now that all your gains have come and gone.
- 44 I seek not the world – it's worth less than a straw.
 And religion itself is only a cage
 without the wealth of the Beloved's presence.
 I long for union with him – that's my last word.
 If someone truly listens, one word is enough.
- 45 Good and bad alike are in the hand of God,
 this truth is both hidden and visible everywhere.
 If you don't believe me, reflect upon this:
 The weakness in me and the power of Satan –
 Where do both come from?
- 46 Sarmad, who lost himself in the Wine,
 reached Sarmadi through love.[†]
 Even the executioner's sword
 could not bring him back to his senses –
 He found his abode in the domain of the Praised Ones.[‡]

*Satan: the negative power, whose task, allotted to him by the Lord, is to see to it that no soul moves past a given point in the inner ascent without first having attained the proper degree of purification and readiness for further inner development.

† Sarmad plays on the meaning of his name here: Sarmadi also means 'the eternal state'.

‡ those who have achieved sainthood and are praised by angels and humans alike.

- 47 The tall, graceful one who steals your attention
and the beautiful, silvery one who steals your gold –
These are not your friends.
Choose a friend who gives you what you need,
one who comes to you when you are in need.
- 48 For the heart that knows, the Beloved is close,
for the eye that sees, his presence is everywhere.
When ears become hearing –
nothing but the Beloved's Name.
When the tongue is adept, every word carries mysteries.
- 49 He dwells not only in temples and mosques –
The whole creation is his abode.
The whole world is bewitched by his tale,
but wise are those who are lost in his love.
- 50 I am a thousand times thankful
that my Beloved is pleased with me –
Present in every breath,
every moment He showers his bounty.
Never did I lose by loving him,
the bargain my heart struck is pure gain.
- 51 Those whose bellies can be filled with a loaf of bread
moan day and night with greed and desire,
the ocean of their being is nothing but a storm.
But we are only guests here –
The bubble of our life lasts only a breath.

- 52 O cruel mind, you are a perfect devil,
 this is obvious, nothing secret about it.
 You yourself are a devil – why blame the Devil?
 He himself is astonished at your thoughts.
- 53 The mystery of the Cup and the Wine
 is not revealed to all,
 the secret can't be entrusted
 to those whose hearts are cold.
 O pretentious ascetic, I swear to God
 you know nothing of God.
 This mystery remains sealed for the dense and the dull.
- 54 The lover and the Beloved, the idol, the idol maker
 and the imposter – they're all one.
 In the Ka'aba, mosque and temple is the same
 one Beloved.
 If you come into this garden you will find one colour –
 The lover and Beloved, the rose and thorn are one.
- 55 Even a moment's separation from him
 is impossible – this union is beyond words.
 He is the ocean, my heart a pitcher.
 But no! – how can the ocean be contained in a pitcher?*

* In mystic tradition, the soul is capable of containing the Mystery and becoming one with it and becoming it, while the mind always raises concerns about the limitations of our human capacity. But indeed, the microcosm contains the macrocosm.

- 56 Do you seek freedom from grief and turmoil?
Then stay aloof from the worldly-minded.
No peace can be found on this earth,
yet if it exists at all, it is found only in solitude.
- 57 This body is founded upon a hundred woes,
like dry grass set on fire it is burnt in a moment.
From the snare of Death there is no escape –
You are the prey, here to meet the hunter.
- 58 Why all this worry for the world?
Your life here lasts for two days only,
no need to attach your heart to home
or escape into forests.
Every moment your life is passing like a faint breeze –
This greed and passion, these wants are needless.
- 59 Until the last breath of their lives
the worldly long only for silver and gold –
They have no peace of mind.
They never think of death, so lost are they
in constant worry to amass more riches.
- 60 The more you shy away from the world and its people,
the greater your tranquillity.
I have seen both spring and autumn
in the garden of this world –
There is a lesson in every rose that blooms and fades.

- 61 Both roses and thorns abound in the garden,
but without the company of my Beloved
gardens and meadows give my heart no happiness.
Look at the red-coloured tulip, red like my heart's blood –
Even with the wound on its petals it is radiant,*
alive like my eyes with longing.
- 62 Countless are my transgressions and delinquencies.
I am beyond repentance, O friends!
I was denied union with my Beloved
because of my blind negligence.
Alas! My years were spent in separation from the Beloved.
- 63 O foolish heart, so absorbed are you in silver and gold
that even in prayer you wander elsewhere.
Deeply lost in delusion and desire for this and that,
you are oblivious of the consequences.
- 64 Though his mercy far exceeds my faults,
my heart is bewildered and saddened by this thought:
What might come of that which I neglected?
My eyes shed tears of hope,
and also foreboding.
- 65 Worldly attachments are best renounced,
success in this will bring you happiness.
Be aloof and let go of everyone –
Of all your plans, this is by far the best.

* wound: the dark spot of pigmentation on the flower; this implies the wound of love.

- 66 My friend, the happiest person
is one who always keeps the Lord in his thoughts.
Both his beginning and end are good.
Don't be too attached to this world, I tell you,
moderation in everything is best.
- 67 Free of wants, my heart is attached to him alone –
It is a fragrant rose in the garden of this world.
The cup of my heart is overflowing with love –
Whatever the vessel holds will flow from it.
- 68 I have been annihilated and do not know what existence is.
I have become a blaze and do not know what smoke is.
I have surrendered my heart, soul and faith.
I have struck a bargain, but I do not know what profit is.
- 69 My heart has again been captured by a beauty,
it is lost in longing for that sweet-natured Flower.
Though I am old, my heart has the zeal of youth –
Wonder of wonders, all the ardour of spring
has appeared again in autumn!
- 70 Memory of what's gone can torture the heart,
it is a losing bargain – the profit is nothing but grief.
My friend, do not waste this dear life in worthless lament,
for it is shorter than a breath.
- 71 Cities and countries, hills and forests, all are worthless.
Fair to the sight or ugly, all are worthless.
Come, let go of everything and surrender yourself to God.
All your desires for the world and religion are worthless.

- 72 O Sarmad, if He is faithful He will come.
 If his coming is destined, He will come of his own will.
 Why do you run after him in vain? Sit in peace.
 If He is Khuda, He will come himself.*
- 73 Strange are the ways of the mind!
 In my youth Satan failed to overcome me,
 the dirt of disobedience did not stain me.
 But with old age sinning has revived –
 It is a strange anguish, and no remedy has come.
- 74 My heart was insane, not content with its destiny,
 never did it cast aside plans and worries.
 Youth has passed but cravings still persist,
 I have grown old but my desires are young.
- 75 Oh my friends, how double-faced you are!
 You carry holy Qu'ran but practise a different faith.
 Like chess pieces, you are always together,
 but plots to strike are raging in your hearts.
- 76 I pray for the butcher boy
 who harbours vengeance in his heart,
 that his heart be cleansed spotless like a mirror.
 If he extends his hand I shall touch his feet,
 but if he turns his back on me
 that is better than confrontation.

* a play on words: Khuda (*khudaa*) means the Lord, while Khud-a (*khud-aa*) means one who comes on his own.

- 77 Those who have reflected on
the permanence of the world,
seen the roses of spring and the withering of autumn,
will not be charmed by the colour and scent
of rose or wine.
They regard all they have seen as unseen.
- 78 With my every sin
his generosity and forgiveness increase.
Thus I have come to feel ashamed of my deeds.
Strange, these very sins have become my guides on the path.
What transgressions,
what mercy and bounty!
- 79 Even if you should command the whole world
and the sun and moon should turn into coins
bearing your name,
even if kings and emperors should be your slaves,
remember this: someday you must go
from this perishable world to the eternal.
- 80 One who has experienced your grace and mercy
is oblivious of others' love or anger.
One refused by You finds favour nowhere,
one accepted by You is refused nowhere.
- 81 Should you seek his mercy and bounty,
should you seek blessings and bliss in both the worlds,
become absorbed in contemplating him –
this is your capital.
Risk your all for his love, for in the end it is pure profit.

- 82 Seclusion gives comfort to the heart –
It is the hidden treasure buried in this life.
You'll find this rare pearl of greatest price
deep in the tumultuous ocean of the world.
- 83 If for a moment the Master gives you a grieving heart,
lasting peace on this earth He will also give.
If the seal of God's love
is impressed upon the ring of your heart
you will have rulership of this creation.
- 84 Do not mourn if your heart is wounded,
do not be overjoyed if you're given more than others.
O Sarmad, if you are thankful to him
for the eternal wealth,
more will you have and more will you be.
- 85 No greater enemy exists in this life than negligence,
no greater vanity than longing for high position.
Be wise, lest when you age and reach the end
you reap a harvest of regrets.
- 86 O Sarmad, you have never complained of the Beloved –
This is good.
You have not engaged in futile talk –
This is good.
You have not run after the world –
It is good you have never done this.

- 87 To dust have returned all your dear ones –
All are bound fast to the saddle of Death,
whose hunting ground is this life.
Though the glory of some may be high as the skies
all must return to dust in the end.
- 88 O Sarmad, the pangs of love
are not granted to the fickle hearted,
the burning heart of the moth is not granted to the fly.
A lifetime is needed to woo the Beloved.
O Sarmad, very few are granted this eternal wealth.
- 89 Wherever you go, may love and faith go with you,
may peace and comfort ever be your companions.
But do not forget to send letters and messages –
Forget me not, and may God be with you.*
- 90 Without remembering the Beloved we have no peace.
Become immersed in him – all thoughts
of wealth and position will then disappear.
Let the Beloved lead your mind and soul,
then eternal good fortune will be yours.
- 91 Let the pious drink this Wine in springtime,
then in autumn the memory will linger.
Drink Wine, for the Hunter
is ever roaming,
ceaselessly scheming to trap you.

* This may have been a message from Sarmad to Prince Dara Shikoh, who had to flee Delhi because of political intrigue.

- 92 Alas, my thoughts raced through this wilderness,
but my mind could not fathom its depth.
I am perplexed by this futile question:
Who has drawn His pattern on the spider's web?
- 93 The heart ensnared in the web of his love
is happy and free of both the worlds.
I see the one face of Inner Reality everywhere.
The mirror that reflects this oneness
is given by God himself.
- 94 Sad and anguished are people of the world,
many are insane, few are awake.
Because of the curse of ego
they spend their couple of days here
wishing ill of others, enslaved by greed and desire.
- 95 Do not desire this world
for it is the enemy of your soul,
a burden that will weigh heavily on your heart.
It is essential in this world to weigh things carefully
on the scale of one's own judgement.
- 96 This world has shown the face of peace to no one –
Speculation on this thought is profitless.
This is true today, was true yesterday
and will remain true forever.
- 97 Hundreds of my friends became enemies,
but the friendship of the One gave solace to my heart.
I chose oneness – now I am free of the many.
I became his and He became mine at last.

- 98 Many have I seen in grief and sorrow,
they left this world stained with cravings.
In the few days they spent here
they gave themselves to passions
and choked their hearts with pains and sorrows.
- 99 These senseless people, all so ignorant of God,
for gold and silver they hate one another.
Do not trust their friendship –
In the short life they have here
they bring each other nothing but hardship.
- 100 The hatred that the worldly have for each other
is unbounded – few, very few indeed are true friends.
For the fickle hearted, pleasures are many,
but for those dear to God, much suffering.
- 101 Friendships in this world are based on a loaf of bread,
none have I seen who love from their soul.
Like dogs they run from door to door for a morsel,
and this they call friendship and support.
- 102 Desires in my life never came to an end,
my foolish heart cared little for consequences.
I pass my nights in sleep and dreams, oblivious –
What to do now that the morning of truth has dawned?
- 103 When at times my heart reflects upon my actions,
it is filled with sorrow and grief.
Yet only for a moment does it refrain
from all those actions that bring regret.

- 104 My heart, like Majnun's, has gone mad with love
 for one with Laila's qualities –^{*}
 In this strange state my home seems a desert.
 Ah! In old age the ascetic has become young,
 the vigour of spring has reappeared in autumn!
- 105 He who gave you a crown of rulership
 gave poverty and bewilderment to me.
 Those who were blemished He clothed,
 those without blemish
 He clothed in nakedness.[†]
- 106 The tavern of this world is full of headaches –
 always hangovers, suffering and sorrows.
 In nothing does pleasure lie
 but in the Wine of yearning for the Friend.
 No one knows the ecstasy of Oneness
 without first the pain of separation.
- 107 The worldly are always displeased with each other,
 they've forsaken all laws of love and fidelity –
 Full of disharmony within, each sings his own tune.
 Ever pretending peace, they are ever at war.
- 108 Seek a Friend who will never be unfaithful,
 nor wound your heart in friendship –
 one who is ceaselessly in your embrace,
 never even a step away.

^{*} Sarmad likens himself to Majnun, a fictional figure who became completely enamoured of Laila and lost his sanity in this love.

[†] It is said that this was Sarmad's reply when asked by Emperor Aurangzeb why he refused to wear clothing.

- 109 Those in love with silver and gold
are forgetful of God and enemies of each other.
Strange, though each one's lot in life is fixed,
they are jealous of one another for God's gifts.
- 110 Wise are those who drink deep of this Wine,
leaving the sorrows and heartaches of life.
Drink Wine, for the great hunter Death
is on his rounds and no one escapes his net.
- 111 This pain of longing for You
pales all colours of the world.
Your courage defeats the pack of leopards,*
your steadfast heart etches my stony mind –
Only a stone can break a stone.
- 112 In the slaughterhouse of love
none but the good are slain,
those weak of character are spared.
If you are a sincere lover, do not flee –
Those not slain here are nothing but carcasses.
- 113 The day when I am buried deep in the ground
I will feel far better, O Lord, by your grace.
Happiness is difficult to find on this earth –
How I hope it is found below ground!

* alludes to the five passions, i.e., lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego.

- 114 O cruel ego, what do you wish to do?
You seek to separate me from others
who were also created by God?
You are ever at war, ever nurturing enmity,
yet at times you pretend to make peace with me.
- 115 Worldly riches never bear sweet fruit,
like dreams and fantasies they have no substance.
Illusions and vain thoughts never bring us joy –
only burdens, grief and turmoil.
- 116 One absorbed in the Beloved's embrace within
seems a lunatic, but he is totally sane and aware.
The hidden Wine ceaselessly bubbles within,
but few know the quality of this ecstasy.
- 117 The love of the Friend has exalted me
and made me needless of the favour of others.
I was set aflame like a candle in this gathering,
and through this burning I became his intimate.
- 118 He knows my transgressions through and through,
yet with every breath He invites me
to the table of his generosity.
In fear and hope
I have spent much time reflecting –
But I find him ever inclined to shower his grace.

- 119 Leave your ego, then faith will be your companion –
This will be your greatest achievement.
The coins of both the worlds will carry your seal.
Like the ring encircling the gem
you will encompass the entire creation.
- 120 Oh my friends, I have a word to say,
listen if you will:
Keep drinking cups of this Wine
for as long as you can –
From this Cup of Jamshid you'll receive divine wealth.
Please do not forget these words.
- 121 No one in this world is aware of God –
Day and night all are engaged
in seeking silver and gold
and resenting each other's company.
But like the passing breeze at dawn
they are here only for a moment.
- 122 O God, I cannot hope for anyone's help –
I do not hope for love or sincerity from anyone.
In this circle of experience I have been imprisoned,
and there is no release but at the door of your mercy.
- 123 This strange sight have I seen:
Everyone begs God for riches and salvation,
or asks for a silver-skinned, moon-faced beauty.
But my desolate heart seeks neither this nor that,
it is yearning for union with him – nothing else.

- 124 Who cannot tell the difference
 between piety and hypocrisy,
 or see your fraud and deceit as I do?
 You ascetics say not to drink Wine,
 to be pious like you, but I reply:
 Go and tell this to one who doesn't know you.
- 125 O Sarmad, cut short your complaints.
 Choose one of these two:
 Surrender to the will of the Friend,
 or offer your life at his feet –
 It's all the same!
- 126 Unless you become nothing,
 you will not be shown the road to Being.
 One who is weak of will is not granted this status –
 Unless you set out to burn like a candle
 you will not be shown the Light.
- 127 My friend, whenever you want to look for vices
 or even to recount the virtues of others,
 review your own faults and study your own record.
 Observe yourself – this indeed is virtue.
- 128 O friend, don't be proud of your show of piety,
 your arrogance will bring you affliction.
 They call you pious but, quite frankly,
 you're a hypocrite, a libertine at large.
 You're a filthy crow
 yet you pose as pure camphor.*

* Camphor is a white crystalline compound that is burned as incense to purify the atmosphere.

- 129 Immeasurable are my transgressions,
yet your grace is immeasurable too, O Lord.
It is boundless and without count –
How can it be numbered?
A hundred years would not suffice
to count my sins
nor to measure your grace.
- 130 Avoid the worldly and take refuge in God
so your heart may embrace the Bride of Peace.
Release the thread that draws you to others
and gain the wealth of ease and comfort.
- 131 Surrender the end of the string of your will
into the hand of the Friend –
Gain release from endless pain and sorrow.
This dear life, so filled with cravings,
now spend with the Friend,
rather than in negligence.
- 132 Less than a bubble are you in this ocean of life,
where the waves surge and disappear.
Hold a mirror before you and look for a moment.
You're a mere reflection in these waters –
How long do you think you will last?
- 133 Be like the breeze at dawn that passes
through gardens and meadows, heeding nothing.
Leave this world's illusions, whims and worries.
Do not be bewitched by colours and perfumes
of flowers and wine – become conscious,
leave these temptations.

- 134 O my friend, look at me
with eyes of wisdom and intuition –
with kindness and steadfast love in your heart.
I am possessed of Inner Meaning and the Sound,
reflect on both covers of this book that I am.
- 135 Morning and evening penitent I stand, and ashamed.
No one knows this secret but myself.
But even with all my faults I am not unmindful –
Always I remember my transgressions,
and your unfailing mercy.
- 136 Let your heart rejoice
in the thought of your Beloved,
hold fast to this eternal wealth.
This is a treasure that brings no pain,
a bargain that yields incalculable gain.
- 137 O God, pray save me from this whirlpool of life,
take my boat across the ocean of sin to safety's shore.
If my sins are countless, your mercy is limitless too –
Strange, but true, no one can reckon this account.
- 138 An impossible task you seek to perform:
While harbouring worldly thoughts and illusions
you hope to embrace the Beloved.
Anything other than him in your heart
is a veil between you and your Friend.

- 139 The pain of love has turned this heart to dust –
Now hold fast to the thread of eternal life.
Should you seek the good fortune
of his kisses and embraces,
then even for a moment
do not part from your Friend.
- 140 O Lord, innumerable sins have I committed –
What am I to do?
Pray save the worn boat of my heart from this whirlpool,
I am drowning in a sea of shame and remorse.
Only your mercy can bring me to shore.
- 141 If you don't let go of moon-faced maidens,
you'll enjoy nothing more than kisses and embraces.
Silver-bodied beauties are entranced by gold and silver –
The treasure of your heart and soul
do not entrust to them.
- 142 Immeasurable are my sins
and immeasurable is my Beloved's grace –
Only my Friend and I know this strange affair.
The eye of his mercy is drawn to the face of sin,
therefore no need to dwell on misdeeds.
- 143 Whenever you meet the flower-scented Cupbearer,
say prayers of thankfulness first.
Do not miss the intoxication of helpless longing,
but stay alert, so you do not miss
the pain that lingers.

- 144 Keeping company with the worldly
is full of degradation and empty of virtue –
Avoid it as far as possible.
The more you mix the greater will be your grief.
I have warned you, the less the better.
- 145 He and I are one,
like the word and its meaning.
Behold union in separation,
like the eye and vision.
Not for a moment is He separate from me –
Behold us together everywhere,
like flower and fragrance.
- 146 It does me good to keep before my mind
my transgressions as well as your mercy –
Constantly I keep the account.
Day and night I weigh them both and reflect:
what I have done,
and what your compassion is doing.
- 147 You will never be happy in the world's embrace –
As for us, we care little for it.
Only the Cupbearer and the Cup will cure your pain,
never, never and never let go of the Goblet!

- 148 Name and fame you seek all through life,
like the royal seal etched on a ring.
Even as you gasp on your death-bed
you are longing to fulfil your desires.
Gather provisions from the storehouse of life,
glean at least one ear of corn –
Harvest time has come and still you are unripe.
- 149 In the company of the fickle-minded
you will never achieve your object,
never will these people grant you peace.
Even if for a hundred years
you're as close to them as a gem in a ring,
you will only gain ill-repute – never a name.
- 150 Oh the pity!
You have never stopped praising yourself,
never realized what is truly profitable.
I will tell you this secret:
If you seek to master both the worlds,
turn in the direction of the path
and never waver from this one direction.
- 151 I am never concerned with the mercy of God,
nor do I worry about my misdeeds.
He knows my rebelliousness and his clemency.
Both are in his hands and I leave everything to him.

- 152 O my heart! In these few days of life,
do not set me and yourself on fire with passions.
Youth has passed and old age has arrived –
Do not set this garment ablaze,
do not rekindle this dying fire.
- 153 Do not rejoice in this perishable realm –
Whether king or beggar
you will not remain here forever.
In this drama of a few days, stay awake,
never for a breath forget the Friend.
- 154 You would shape this world after your desires,
never longing for the life hereafter from God.
And what will be the result?
You'll be given neither this world nor the one beyond,
you'll reap nothing but regrets and remorse.
- 155 O ascetic, by God I tell you, you have no brains!
Repent of your hypocrisy and abstinence – drink the Wine.*
The Cup and the Mirror are full of Truth,[†]
both form and meaning are resounding within.
- 156 O heart, free yourself from cravings and longings,
carry not this burden on your tired shoulders.
Your life is not as long as your list of desires –
For a few days' stay here, do not suffer much.

* Wine: the inner ecstasy and intimacy, also the Word.

† mirror: metaphorically, the Perfect One.

- 157 Once I was bathed in the Light of Truth within,
 I abandoned all planning and scheming.
 If you, too, seek this transcendence,
 leave your lower self – then from head to foot
 you will see your whole being as God's refulgence.
- 158 O pious ascetic, do not waste your advice on me –
 The vessel of this body is boiling in the fire of his love.
 Come to your senses, see that the tavern of the heart
 is tumultuous, resonant – ardent for his Wine of love.
- 159 O my friend, do not be friendless in this Tavern,
 do not be without the rose-faced Wineserver.
 The all-revealing Cup is not given to everyone,
 do not be indifferent to this great good fortune.
- 160 Ceaselessly drink the Wine of the Beloved's remembrance,
 do not forsake your faith for this transitory world.
 The fire of desires you have set ablaze
 on this two days' journey here,
 even tempests will not extinguish.
- 161 Do not don the ascetic's cloak –
 This asceticism is useless, it is wrong.
 Regard the rosary and sacred thread as false,
 hold fast the thread of love for the Beloved.

- 162 Place no value on the promises of the worldly,
for this is wrong, yes, wrong –
wrong today, wrong tonight and wrong tomorrow.
Do not ask me to read
the authentic version of our life –
The script, meaning, composition and spelling
of the life we are living now is wrong!
- 163 At your last breath the world will not be your friend.
Struggle on the path to God,
for He is friend and companion.
Should you wish to reach the Beloved,
I tell you, my friend, this is the only path.
- 164 If you desire never to stumble on the stony path,
forsake ego, do not hesitate.
Never surrender to your heart's desires,
be ever at war with your tyrant mind.
- 165 All your thoughts and plans are stumbling stones –
In the forest of endless thinking and planning
the prowling leopard stalks.*
Do you think your will is stronger
than your destiny ordained by God?
Do not set your weakness against that strength.

* the mind, which fights the spiritual quest.

- 166 The madness of my heart is the perfection of wisdom,
but the chaos of love
is beyond the grasp of the mind:
Can the ocean be contained in a pitcher?
Impossible, it says, even though some may claim it.
- 167 Let my heart, faded and wilted,
become fresh like a flower,
and my soul sing like a nightingale!
In the autumn of life I seek the ecstasy of springtime –
to sip ruby red Wine with my tulip-faced Beauty.
- 168 My friend, cut the thread
of endless desires in your heart,
gain peace and freedom in both the worlds.
The garden of this life is not large enough
for all the desires blossoming
in the garden of your dreams.
- 169 Worldly possessions are grief and worry.
Be wise, my friend, reflect and see:
They are a passing shadow – dreams and illusions
beginning with anguish and pain,
and bringing great suffering in the end.
- 170 One who possesses wisdom and maturity
leaves the circle of impossible thought.
Sitting in a corner of the tavern
he beholds the one Candle
that lights the lanterns of a thousand thoughts.

- 171 In the season of flowers it's a natural desire
to meet him wearing garlands in my hair.
Whether a time of flowers or falling leaves,
whenever this happens it will always
be springtime for me.
- 172 I was heedless of the consequences of my deeds,
and my life was spent in grief and misery – I lost heart.
Now I constantly question myself:
What have you gained from this precious life?
- 173 Bitterly I regret that the wealth of life
was spent in negligence –
wasted in worries, illusions and dreams.
I was careless of the consequences of my deeds.
All my thoughts, I discovered, were dreams
never to be realized.
- 174 In the autumn of life it is difficult to repent –
difficult to make a vow
with the Cupbearer and the Wine.
But strange, in autumn spring has arrived again.
How difficult it is to do away with
making and breaking vows!
- 175 With this tyrant of an ego I am ever in battle –
I am a whale on the hunt in the ocean of my life.
Desires and greed are nothing but cunning foxes
whom I watch with the eyes of a tiger
in the jungle of my mind.

- 176 The understanding of God's grace has at last come to me –
I became a scale, weighing and considering all things well.
I discovered that his forgiving eyes are drawn to sins.
No doubt about it, this I have seen again and again.
- 177 How long should I worry about my dark record
and ponder my actions in sadness?
I will rest in his grace and mercy
and be released from past, present and future.
- 178 I have pledged myself forever
to the circle of his contemplation.
A hundred thanks I give every moment
that I am happy in his remembrance.
Freed from the snares of greed and passion,
I have driven this heavy burden from my heart.
- 179 O my Lord! Grant me the gift of patience and contentment.
For a lifetime I have suffered from greed and desire,
but I cannot barter away my faith for profit –
Now I am constantly measuring my profit and loss.
- 180 I know I'm worth less than a piece of straw,
but still I find I'm filled with greed and desire.
I've realized that my tyrant ego, forever in turmoil,
is but a single breath in the ocean of existence.

- 181 Oh the agony! My capricious Friend
does not even look at me – what should I do?
The sighs of my heart have no effect – what should I do?
Though He is ever in my heart,
ever heedless of my heart He remains –
What should I do?
- 182 What is most useless? What is it? It is me.
The palm tree that bears no fruit is me.
I myself have pondered and calculated:
That mere speck of dust, of no account, is me.
- 183 I am my own king – why should I stoop
to seek the favour of other kings?
For a loaf of bread, why should I stoop
to seek the favour of any low character?
My ego is a dog, and I am a dog-keeper.
For this dog – why should I stoop
to other dog-keepers?
- 184 If you say I am enamoured of gardens and meadows,
I am so.
If you say I am infatuated with Wine,
I am so.
Sometimes I seek the world, sometimes spirit.
If you say I am baffled by this mystery,
I am so.

- 185 I am mad for the radiance of a different kind of Friend –
 bewildered by a different kind of form and beauty.
 The world is engrossed in other thoughts,
 but mine is another task –
 a different kind of longing.
- 186 The tears of my heart have become an ocean.
 Madly infatuated with roaming the desert,
 I have taken vows of solitude and shun company.
 In companionship with the *anqa**
 I have become alone.
- 187 The seething in this realm of bubbles is from ancient time,
 this mirage of forms is from ancient time.
 The old inn of this world thirsts for a new design –
 This wretched house is in ruins since ancient, ancient time.
- 188 Every moment I am trapped in a hundred transgressions,
 from morn to eve I am saddened by my desires.
 I seek to release myself from this trap –
 Destiny it may not be,
 but I will make ceaseless effort.
- 189 I am distraught, caught in my Beloved's curls.
 I did not will it, it was my destiny.
 I am held captive in the curls of that hair,
 but because of this accursed intellect
 my feet are in chains.

* *anqa*: a legendary celestial bird that lives in the skies and keeps no contact with the earth.

- 190 Not for a moment have I enjoyed myself under this sky –
My precious life was spent in pain and affliction.
Worldly wealth is damaging in two ways:
If too much, it brings suffering,
if too little, grief.
- 191 For my misdeeds, I bow my head in shame.
I have passed my life in misery,
doing what I should not.
But look to your mercy, O Lord,
and not to my deeds!
- 192 Alas! I stand disgraced by my desires,
I have travelled the path of pride and ego.
At last, in old age I gave myself to the world,
but I wonder: Why did I accept this heavy load?
- 193 I am sad – I've been sowing seeds of desire
and picking a hundred burning flowers of sorrow.
Even a typhoon will not extinguish
this fire of desires I carry within me.
- 194 Though old in appearance, I am young in sins –
My feet have worn these chains for a lifetime.
But even if I'm imprisoned by countless sins,
I have hope for a thousand salvations
in a single act of his grace.

- 195 Because of God's resplendent grace
 I am ever comforted –
 Even plain barley bread keeps me content.
 I neither fear this world nor worry about the other.
 In the corner of the tavern I am tranquil and free.*
- 196 A thousand times and more am I grateful
 for my Beloved's mercy –
 I've come to realize his grace and generosity.
 The tree that He planted now bears fruit,
 at last I've picked a flower from the garden of love.
- 197 From the garden of his crafts I have gathered roses,
 I've realized the meaning of sin and forgiveness.
 In the mirror I saw what I saw,
 but that sublime reflection cannot be expressed.
- 198 In this realm I am ever in bliss –
 The Cupbearer sits by my side, pure Wine is in the cup.
 O man of piety, you say that this Wine is forbidden.
 I tell you that it is sacred and lawful.
- 199 I have seen the burning and pain,
 not in one but in one thousand places.
 I have seen the play of the moth and the flame –
 The source of Light is in some other Hand.
- 200 His compassion is a thousand times greater than my sins,
 I became a scale and measured both.
 Now I hesitate before I take action –
 I understand the meaning of sin and forgiveness.

* tavern: in the presence of the Beloved.

- 201 Alas! I wasted time worshipping things created
and not the Creator himself.
Base desires kept me on the downward path.
These were the days of youth – I behaved like a drunkard.
But this wine gave me headaches – now I am sober.
- 202 Weak and powerless is my heart,
it is pained by the tyranny of worldly people.
And this heart is so unsteady –
Sometimes it pines for the world,
sometimes for the world beyond.
Oh the tragedy! My heart is torn between the two.
- 203 I desire with all my soul one thing from this world:
that my soul remain safe from the world.
From the world and its people I want nothing,
night and day I only seek refuge from both.
- 204 My transgressions grieve me night and day,
I am ashamed and heavy-hearted at what I've done.
And what may result from that which I haven't done?
Oh, what a struggle! I constantly worry
about the consequences of my deeds.
- 205 My heart has borne much suffering in this world,
night and day it has been in anguish.
Then suddenly the image of my Beloved appeared –
This heavy burden was lifted from my heart.

- 206 O confidant of my heart and soul,
I swear by your love –
You know the innermost recesses of my heart.
I am shamed by my deeds in the face of your mercy.
Every moment now I am keeping the account:
my rebellion and your mercy.
- 207 O Lord, You are the One
in whose hand rests happiness and sorrow.
None other than You
can relieve me of sorrow's burden.
I have seen all and tested everyone –
You alone shower generosity and grace.
- 208 I sipped the flowery cup of Wine
and strolled through the garden –
I filled my skirt with flowers
from the garden of fulfilment.
Wander the Garden of Grace in springtime,
then in the days of autumn, blossom!
- 209 From life's provisions I still have
a little strength of heart and a sturdy body.
Last night a dervish told me:
In the kingdom of poverty let there be no throne,
we are happy with our gorgeous good fortune.
- 210 My eyes well up with tears –
I am drowning in the sea of shame and regret.
My only wish is that even for one breath
I may not forget You,
but alas! with every breath I am negligent.

- 211 With the eye of my heart
 I witnessed the beauty of both worlds.
 I became a scale and weighed both good and bad.
 A head burdened with thoughts
 weighs like a stone on the heart –
 The head that is lighter travels light.
- 212 O my friend, for a few breaths are you on this earth –
 Even if Jamshid's cup is offered from heaven,
 reject it without hesitation,
 for your heart will not find happiness.
 This petty intoxication will bring a great hangover.
- 213 Although I've committed many sins,
 I discovered that your benevolence
 is far greater than my misdemeanours.
 I became a scale and weighed them both –
 Your grace and generosity
 make me bow my head in shame.
- 214 O Lord! How long will I continue sinning every moment?
 I am ashamed at your mercy in the face of my deeds.
 I have been shameless, committed numberless sins –
 Being a sinner, what else could I do?
- 215 I warn you, don't be tied to the miseries of the world,
 nor seek happiness in mountains or forests.
 I warn you, see this world as a great mirage,
 and yourself – froth of a bubble, wave of the ocean.

- 216 From the quiet corner of renunciation
 I watched the world and walked through it.
 Keeping aloof, I found rest and peace.
 Neither good nor evil can push me off balance now –
 This I gleaned from looking in the Mirror.
- 217 If you have wisdom and courage
 seek no favour from the world, I tell you,
 it cannot help you.
 Do not draw pictures of your desires
 on a spider's web,
 this is vanity and illusion, I tell you.
- 218 My heart's been lost
 in love and longing for the Beloved,
 a heavy load it has taken on itself.
 O ascetic, do not give me much advice –
 My heart is set on a different task.
- 219 The king of kings I am, O you ascetic,
 I am not naked like you.
 All ardour and joy of love I am,
 not distracted like you.
 Idol worshipper and non-believer I am,
 not one of the faithful flock.
 I go to the mosque, but I am not a Muslim.*

* Muslim here refers to one who practises orthodox religious rituals and ceremonies.

- 220 With thoughts and illusions of others I have nothing to do,
 but in composing ghazals I've adopted the style of Hafiz.
 In composing rubaiyat I am a disciple of Khayyam,
 but I have tasted a little of his wine.
- 221 Whatever I have said, I've said – writing on water.
 Whatever I've said, I've said – evanescent bubbles.
 In old age my tongue is silent,
 whatever I had to say I said in my youth.
- 222 Never, by God, will I pretend devotion,
 and nowhere will I beg but at the door of Reality.
 I am a king and rule the kingdom of peace –
 Never will I step from the tavern.
- 223 The emperor who rules all, both Arab and Persian,
 has in his grace and generosity
 revealed himself to me.
 Like the night of *qadr*, this revelation*
 has given me immeasurable worth.
 Now the world is quite worthless in my eyes.
- 224 The One who is ever my companion
 judges by his mercy and not by my sins.
 I am greatly ashamed of my deeds –
 Perhaps my repentance will come to my rescue.

* The night of *qadr* is the night in which the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

- 225 I tell you the truth in a few words
 so that you may become aware:
 While on earth live a happy life –
 The world is sometimes this way, sometimes that,
 nothing is lasting here.
 Even Kaikhusrau and Jamshid came and went.*
- 226 O my friend! Choose a corner of seclusion
 to enjoy the intensity of the Beloved's love.
 Leave all grief and choose tranquillity.
 Do not be scattered like the whirlwind –
 Centre your heart on the Beloved
 and choose peace.
- 227 Keep your heart happy in his remembrance,
 whatever promises you have given him,
 be mindful of them.
 Promises are precious, do not forget this.
 Free yourself from everyone's traps.
- 228 Nothing pleasurable have I seen on earth
 and I doubt it is different underground.
 Desires crowd our mind here –
 Perhaps the atmosphere is no better there!
- 229 A hundred colours paint this ever changing world,
 sometimes it is spring and sometimes autumn.
 O friend, do not be disheartened
 by the ups and downs of life,
 produce the remedy from your pain and cure yourself.

* Kaikhusrau and Jamshid were legendary kings of ancient Persia during an era of great power and prosperity.

- 230 If you desire eternal joy and freedom from misery,
retreat from people and seek solitude.
This will bring rest and peace in both the worlds.
Hear this from me and choose tranquillity.
- 231 Ever since thoughts and dreams of him
made their home in my heart,
from head to foot I've become
nothing but remembrance of him.
I am ever in communion within,
but this can never be expressed –
That is all I can say.
- 232 O Lord, You opened to me
the doors of generosity and clemency,
and my heart blossomed like a flower
of a hundred colours – the envy of the garden!
I could never describe
even one of your thousand attributes,
even if my whole being became a tongue
to express my gratitude.
- 233 Behold! This illusion of life is only a bubble,
this sea of storms is only a mirage.
Open your inner eye,
see that the whole world
is nothing but water and reflection.

- 234 Strange are the ways of passion –
As I grew old my sins became young.
The flowers of desire have blossomed in autumn,
and rose-cheeked beauties have made me childish.
One moment I am pious,
the next moment rebellious, full of sin.
- 235 If you wish to shine like a brilliant gem,
shun the crowd and sit in solitude.
I have seen many lose themselves
in this wilderness –
in the cold selfishness of the world
and the heat of zealous religion.
- 236 On one side is desire for the world,
on the other, longing for heaven.
Each of us is in the throes of death,
and still the heart is seeking glory.
The truth I've experienced is beyond these –
I live between opposites,
like a gem in a ring.
- 237 Once the love of the Beloved
chose my heart for its abode
my heart blossomed in a hundred colours
and became a garden.
Hidden yet visible I am in this ancient realm.
I cannot be revealed through my words.

- 238 My friend, keep your heart in his embrace
and rise to the inner sky.
Do not forget the words of this devotee:
Erase both worlds from your heart.
- 239 O Sarmad, say nothing of the Ka'aba or the monastery,
nor ramble forlorn in the valley of doubt
like those misguided.
Learn the way of devotion from Satan himself.*
Choose one altar of worship, and bow to no other.
- 240 In the springtime dwell in the lane of the Magi –†
Pretend madness and be liberated.
This woolen cloak of pretentious piety is a burden,
drop it from your shoulders and gain tranquillity.
- 241 O Master, do not shut the door of your clemency and grace
upon one whom You have accepted –
A weakling like myself cannot shoulder a heavy burden.
I have grown old, and I pray to You,
save me from further transgressions.
- 242 Abandon the thought of serving emperors –
No one has lived here forever.
The foreheads of emperors I have seen –
They are furrowed with anxiety.
I tell you, this world is not worth
a single furrow on the forehead.

* It is said in the Qur'an that Satan was cast away from heaven for not bowing before Adam; he would bow only before God.

† literally, the priests of ancient Persia, but here meaning the Masters.

- 243 One who is Loved cares not for worldly love.
 In this world I have never found
 a single friend to share my pain.
 The fragrant rose of fidelity is rare indeed.
 Just glide through a spring and an autumn here.
- 244 O Beloved, in your generosity
 gladden my burdened heart, I pray.
 Rebuild this desolate body and mind.
 I long to embrace the Bride of Joy,
 free me from the net of the world's grief.
- 245 O rose-cheeked Beauty,
 silvery, slender and tall as a cypress,
 come for a stroll in the garden – it is springtime.
 Don't hide in your chamber like a budding flower,
 this is cruel – the roses and jasmine will soon fade.
- 246 My Beloved is cruel and hard-hearted,
 I do not know where all this will lead.
 In days of loneliness
 none but my shadow keeps me company,
 but in this darkest of nights
 even my shadow deserts me –
 I stand alone in sorrow.
- 247 Why should one love glory,
 wasting one's life to gain such an end?
 Why do we need to glow like a gem
 when we are only to suffer death and indignity?

- 248 Sad, sad are your thoughts.
What gain from these endless desires,
 why these wishes that consume the heart?
The thread of your life quivers with every breath –
How will you fare with your feeble will power?
- 249 O friend, do good in this life when you may,
 your time here is no longer than a breath.
Hurt no one.
Consider pleasing people of the heart a privilege.
Wherever you find someone in distress, be a friend.
- 250 Rejoice in remembrance of the Beloved
 and free yourself from sorrow and agony.
Remember also the friends
 who were close to you day and night,
 in joy and sorrow.
- 251 The ocean of his generosity has no shore.
The tongue is powerless to thank,
 the heart too bewildered to understand.
Though my sins are many
 his compassion is greater still –
I swim in the seas of disobedience
 but I do not drown.
- 252 Always I have seen the world in change –
 never on a level, ever unsteady.
Sometimes He makes me pious,
 sometimes an unbeliever.
One minute I am green like a palm tree,
 the next minute barren.
Then in the middle of autumn, I am spring again!

- 253 Without your mercy
my inner difficulties will never be resolved,
nor will my heart find respite from this grief.
O my Lord! Make the field of my devotion ever green,
so I may reap the treasure of tranquillity.
- 254 If you wish to escape from life's vexations,
keep away from worldly people.
Take them all for snakes and scorpions,
seek refuge from their company.
- 255 O friend, how long will you
wander in sorrow under this sky,
searching for gold and silver on this earth?
Sit in a corner like a gem in a ring
and behold:
Nothing here but patterns on water, a mirage.
- 256 Befriend detachment for a breath,
lay down your heavy load – become light.
By the time you open your eyes to life
you will have to close them again.
Wake up to yourself, O unconscious friend!
- 257 It is amazing that your heart
has not become dejected
with agonizing after the world,
that your sleeping heart has not awakened.
You never sowed the seeds of repentance –
What will you garner from your harvest of regrets?

- 258 In the floodwaters of transgression
every hair of my body is drenched in sin.
I am all evil, You are all goodness.
Oh, how long will I trespass and go astray,
and how long will You show me clemency?
I am ashamed of my deeds,
and more so because of your mercy.
- 259 Go beyond ego and be safe from wickedness –
How long will you remain a thorn?
Become a garden for a while.
Battle your tyrant of a mind fiercely.
I have warned you, O friend,
become your own enemy. .
- 260 To understand him through intellect is not easy,
to grasp him with the mind or eyes is difficult.
My heart has gone insane and my eyes are bewildered
trying to find, see and comprehend him.
- 261 Do not be proud of your wealth and property –
Do not rejoice in this intoxication.
No difference exists between gain and loss;
neither rejoice at one, nor mourn over the other.
- 262 O Lord, why is my heart grieving?
Tell me!
How long will I live in agony?
Tell me!
Though I am full of evil,
forgive me in your generosity.
Who, if not You, will show me mercy?
Tell me!

- 263 O Lord! Who is he that is without sin?
 How does one live without sinning?
 If I commit sins and You punish me in equal measure,
 then where is your grace –
 What then is the difference between You and me?*
- 264 The blue sky of the world rains stones –
 Behind a curtain of peace, it wages war against you.
 There is no way of escape but through the Cup,
 even if it rains disgrace.
- 265 O friend, do not be broken-hearted by your fantasies,
 do not give in to malicious thoughts
 when others are good or evil.
 Keep company with none but the Wineserver and the Cup.
 Should you desire friends, seek no more than two or three.
- 266 If you seek to be a friend to your Self,
 then become an enemy of your self.
 Thus be safe from the misfortune of worldly desires.
 This cruel ego is a thorn that rends your heart –
 Remove it and let the garden of your heart bloom.
- 267 O Lord, every moment is full of regret for my sins –
 in my heart all shame, on my lips all sighs.
 O fair winds of union, it is time to help me,
 my ship is sinking in the sea of sin.

* This verse is also attributed to Omar Khayyam.

- 268 From earthly ties we reap nothing but pain and sorrow.
O friend, cut your heart free from everyone
and gain peace.
Leave yourself in God's hands and fear nothing,
be free of whims, wishes and struggles.
- 269 For many years I couldn't tell good from bad.
Counting on your mercy, I sinned
and blackened the record of my deeds.
From your power come our strengths and weaknesses –
There is no might and no strength
but in God.
- 270 Except at your door of mercy I find no refuge.
Helpless, humbled and ruined now I stand –
Neither the capacity for devotion
nor the strength for sin is left in me.
There is no might and no strength
but in God.
- 271 An impudent beauty captured my heart with a glance –
Those dark eyes turned my days black as night.
In the end, my youth and old age merged.
There is no might and no strength
but in God.
- 272 Alas! I did not take the shelter of destiny,
and ruined myself with schemes and actions.
Do not take pride in your own strength and power –
There is no might and no strength
but in God.

- 273 O Master! My evil deeds have ruined me –
 Only your mercy can give me refuge.
 Although I am weak and Satan is powerful,
 there is no might and no strength
 but in God.
- 274 The cruelties of destiny ruined me
 because I sought shelter with kings and beggars.
 I met everyone and tested them well –
 There is no might and no strength
 but in God.
- 275 Whether I am pious or enslaved by my sins,
 You are the One who gives shelter regardless.
 Under your command lie the good and evil of all –
 There is no might and no strength
 but in God.
- 276 O ascetic! What sweet pleasure
 have you tasted in this hypocrisy?
 You have woven a hundred cloaks together
 to show off your piety,
 and from the thread of your rosary, fine as a hair,
 you have made a strong rope for hanging yourself.
- 277 You've been sowing seeds of vain desires,
 what do you imagine you will harvest?
 Worldly trade brings no gain in the end –
 All you imagined so profitable will be loss.

- 278 In this snare of desires
you're entangled with your ego
for as long as you breathe –
caged day and night.
Stand upright and free like the cypress
in this garden of existence,
for if you are hyacinth or jasmine
you're entangled in thorns and weeds.
- 279 Even if you rise as high as the heavens
choose humility,
for in the end you will turn to dust.
Worldly comfort is not worth a grain of barley.
Shake off greed and become forever pure.
- 280 On my forehead are written all my transgressions,
but You favour me secretly with your grace.
Inner secrets stand revealed before You –
Whether I am sinful or pious, You know.
- 281 If you are seeking the wine of tranquillity,
and if you're drunk with freedom from this world,
then give up all, even religion,
and hold fast to the robe of the Friend.
In this intoxication you'll transcend both worlds.
- 282 O friend, how long will you engage
in thoughts of the world?
How long will you wander forlorn
in forests, mountains and deserts?
The vast robe of contentment shelters you,
do not give it up till your last breath.

- 283 You are not just this soul, this heart and faith.
You are the One who is everything –
everywhere, every moment.
I beheld You, beyond all thought and imagination –
That which cannot be comprehended,
You are that.
- 284 O precious soul, why do you remain ignorant?
You should know how long you will last here.
In vain are you proud of this unreal existence –
A guest here for two, three breaths,
you will not live here forever.
- 285 Every moment He appears in a different form,
there is always a glimmer of him in my eyes and heart.
Where is someone with a heart weary enough
to abandon himself,
to behold the secret of this vision?
- 286 O desolate one, you are ignorant of God!
O ripple of a mirage, you are ignorant of God.
This imagined existence of yours
is but an image on water –
O drifting bubble, you are ignorant of God.
- 287 You have graced and forgiven me far beyond my sins.
At the table of your generosity
you have always welcomed me as a guest.
The more I sinned, the more You forgave –
In this way You made me repent for my deeds.

- 288 Suppose your body is all silver and gold
 like the shining narcissus,*
 but as soon as you open your eyes
 you will see you are vanishing.
 Desire for wealth and glory brings you suffering –
 In your spring fever, you are ignorant of autumn.
- 289 Do not be careless of danger among the worldly,
 nor be happy in their warmth.
 Flee their company
 so in this cage of deceit
 you won't become the prey
 of all those in the throes of death.
- 290 When aged and brittle
 you'll walk through this garden of life
 and shed tears of a hundred colours.
 Without the tulip-faced Beloved
 you'll not have blossomed –
 You'll have withered while still a bud.
- 291 How long will you suffer,
 wandering through mountains and deserts
 bearing the load of greed and desires?
 Be wise, my friend:
 Your life is not as vast as your desires,
 there is still time for you to repent.

* In Greek mythology, Narcissus is the beautiful youth who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool. He pined away and was transformed into the flower that bears his name.

- 292 Alas, you are unaware of your own condition!
 You are your own enemy, not your own best well-wisher.
 Lack of awareness and drunken negligence
 bring a hangover – be warned,
 for you won't be there for the Wine at dawn.*
- 293 Your sufferings arise from desire for wealth and glory –
 Hold fast to the Beloved and live in comfort.
 My friend, if you neglect this truth
 you will have much to regret.
 If you become aware, you will live in ease.
- 294 O Lord, this lowly person
 can accomplish nothing
 but endless negligence and sin.
 Now that all has come and gone
 I've awakened –
 I have accomplished nothing worthy.
- 295 My friend, you have wandered
 through cities, towns and deserts.
 You have followed the path of desires,
 pursuing a hundred passions.
 This caravan is reaching the destination
 and the journey is ending –
 Where have you been?

* Wine: the bliss of his love; the Name or the Word.

- 296 O my heart, it's a mistake to be frightened
of the realm of eternity –
Reflect upon what it is you fear.
On the path of annihilation
there is no worry, only comfort.
That realm is better than this –
Why are you afraid?
- 297 People of the world bring many anxieties,
this thicket is full of wolves and tigers.
In the company of those with hearts of stone
the glass goblet of your heart
is ever in danger of being shattered.
- 298 Sad indeed is the thought
that you are heedless of your deeds
in this desert of desires.
Regard these few breaths of life as non-existence –
You imagine yourself to be more,
but know that you are less than a speck of dust.
- 299 If you learn to float you will find that your heart
is an ocean encompassing the seven regions.
Dive and discover that all creation
exists within the ocean of your existence.
You may then become a storm, or an anchor.
- 300 O my heart, by God, you are unmindful of God,
hunting silver and gold from dawn to dusk.
You are less than a bubble, a ripple in a mirage –
Like a breeze, you will pass in a moment.

- 301 Every evening you are drunk on the wine of ignorance,
every morning you are indifferent to your existence.
The goblet of this realm is full of bitterness –
Beware, for the end may be treacherous.
- 302 If you want to achieve your goal and avoid bitterness,
if you want to have peace and no regret,
be patient and make contentment a habit.
You are struggling because of desires and greed.
- 303 You are always visible, even when you are hiding.
You too know this hidden secret –
You display yourself like a candle in a lantern,
You are ever naked in this attire of yours!
- 304 O my Beloved, in this world of sorrow
You are my only comfort,
You alone know my wretched condition.
I have seen all and tested everyone –
In my forlorn state, You alone are the loyal friend.
- 305 In utter madness you run after gold and silver –
Nothing but regret will you carry from this world.
No more than a breath is your illusory life,
you are a bubble that drifts and bursts.
- 306 In the sea of life you are less than a twig or piece of straw,
like a bubble, you're imprisoned here for only a moment.
Take my advice, free yourself from the cage of ignorance –
It is pointless to be a captive of your desires.

- 307 Why are you suffering this agony
for a few days of life here?
No need to carry this heavy burden
on your shoulders.
If today you abandon all cravings,
tomorrow you won't have to bear
the pain and sorrow of separation.
- 308 O fool! You are ignorant of the Lord,
confused and maddened by gold and silver.
Worldly gain and loss are in the hands of God,
yet you are jealous when He is generous to some.
- 309 O dear soul, by God, you are ignorant!
For a few breaths you are a guest in this house of the body.
And even if you climb this wheel and become the sun,*
you're a minute particle that counts for nothing.
- 310 If you seek to be a king and not a beggar,
then abandon self-righteous thoughts.
Gain purity of heart by drinking the dregs of pain,
and don't move even a step from the tavern.
- 311 How sad! You are ignorant of true existence
and always drunk on the wine of pride.
However high you may rise,
you are like the flame of dry grass.
Because of the curse of rebelliousness,
you will fall degraded in the end.

* to ascend to the top of creation and win all honour and wealth available there.

- 312 Sometimes You are a cypress,
 sometimes a hyacinth and sometimes a jasmine.
 Sometimes You are mountains and deserts,
 and sometimes gardens.
 Sometimes You are the light of the lamp,
 and sometimes the fragrance of a flower.
 Sometimes You are in the meadows,
 and sometimes where people gather.
- 313 Though You seem cruel and unkind,
 above all others You are steadfast and compassionate.
 As I moved through this world of trials,
 I discovered that wherever there's a broken heart,
 You are the Friend.
- 314 O Sarmad! What a confusion you created in religion –
 You sacrificed your faith for those intoxicated eyes.*
 In humility and supplication
 you offered all your wealth
 to an idol-worshipper!
- 315 What a pity! You are filled with desire from head to foot.
 Pause and think: who and what are you?
 I tell you, be free of this snare of negligence.
 As long as you are a slave to your cravings
 you remain in a cage.

* refers to the eyes of the Master that are intoxicated with the Wine of love.

- 316 O heart! You became dejected
because of endless desires and greed.
You sought consolation
in the gains and losses of this world.
But you rendered yourself worthless
and became a disgrace in both worlds –
This heavy burden has left you sad and weary.
- 317 O heart! You've lost your way in these times,
you have chained yourself to greed and desire.
If you don't free yourself from this net of misfortune,
you'll know pain, sorrow and sighs from head to foot.
- 318 O friend, even for a breath
you did not become free of desire and greed.
You didn't go beyond property, work and worry.
Every donkey and cow is also concerned
with physical existence,
but you didn't even become human –
You became less than a dog.
- 319 O friend, wake up!
You are asleep, unaware of yourself.
This negligence will bear no fruit but regret.
All your companions have gone
and you too are on your way,
but you won't reflect on your illusory existence.
- 320 Every day you spend in the whirlpool of passion,
all night you're asleep in the darkness of negligence.
Youth has passed and old age has arrived –
There is still time, if you would but realize
the grace of the Beloved.

Appendix 1

Sarmad's Religious Background

Isaac Ezekiel and other biographers acknowledge that there are only three major sources of information on Sarmad's parentage and religious background (as well as his detachment and sense of humour even in the face of death). These sources are *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, commonly attributed to Mobed Shah, *Mirat al-Khayal* by Sher Khan Lodi, and *Riaz-ush Shu'ara* by Ali Quli Khan, also known as Waleh Dagastani.

The information is far from definitive, and the authors themselves are not in full agreement. It is interesting to note that Sarmad's recent biographers have all drawn from and expanded upon these same three sources, and their accounts vary according to their own backgrounds and perspectives.

The following statements are culled from the accounts of Sarmad in the original Farsi sources and are translated below.

Dabistan-i Mazahib:

- Sarmad is a descendant of Jewish scholars called Rabbis.³⁶⁹
- After learning Jewish scriptures, he became Muslim [converted] and studied with Mullah Sadra and Abul Qasim Fendereski.³⁷⁰

- Sarmad, also known as Sarmad-i Kashani by many biographers, was a Jew who converted to Islam. He received the name Muhammad Said and studied with ...Muslim scholars such as Mullah Sadra Shirazi and Abul Qasim Fendereski.³⁷¹

Riaz-ush Shu'ara:

- Sa'id Sarmad was of Kashani Jews [from Kashan, Iran] who had converted to Islam. He was a merchant...in Surat [India]. He was released from his self by a ray of Truth [Haq]; he then gave away his wealth and wandered the countryside.³⁷²
- I heard, from a reliable source, that from the court to his execution site, Sarmad uttered twenty-four rubais [quatrains].³⁷³
- When the executioner looked at him, Sarmad said, "Come, come, in whatever guise You come, I know You."³⁷⁴
- In response to a friend's suggestion to give up on his ways, Sarmad said, "It's been a while and Mansur's story has become ancient. I will again glorify the hanging rope."³⁷⁵

Mirat al-Khayal:

- Sarmad [was] from Farang (the West) and was Armenian [could imply Christian]. He amassed...great wealth and went to India. There he met a young Hindu boy through whom love conquered his heart and he gave

away all...went around naked...and told the executioner, with a smile, "Come, in whatever guise You appear, I know You."³⁷⁶

When all is said and done—and no matter what facts may be known or how much of his early life may be shrouded in mystery—Sarmad's life and teachings were most certainly beyond possession by any one religion. The following couplet of Abhai Chand in *Dabistan-i Mazahib* truly reflects Sarmad's universality:

I submit to Moses's law;
I am of thy religion, and a guardian of the way;
I am a Rabbi of the Yahuds, a Kafir, a Muselman.³⁷⁷

Appendix 2

Additional Biographical Sources

Contemporary historians of the days of Emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707) covered the life of Sarmad with a conspiracy of silence. They rose to great heights of eloquence in praising the conquests of Aurangzeb, gave detailed descriptions of the life of the people, and even dealt with children's street games, but they had little space for Sarmad, to whom they made only a passing reference. They may have been afraid to arouse the anger of the Emperor. Khizani Khan, who wrote a comprehensive history of those days under the title *Albab*, did not mention a single word about Sarmad.

Mirza Muhammed Kazim, one of the courtiers of Aurangzeb, started on a similar work, *Deh Salah*, after receiving the consent of the emperor, but he had to stop the work when the imperial command required him to do so. No mention of Sarmad's death was made by Kazim. Even Mustaid Khan in his voluminous work, *Ma'asir-i Alamgiri* (The Contemporaries of Alamgir), which was written during the reign of Shah Alam and which incorporated *Deh Salah*, made no reference to Sarmad.

In commenting on this studied silence surrounding Sarmad amidst the glorification of Aurangzeb's reign, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the great Indian scholar and patriot who was for many years the Minister of Education in India, caustically

remarked that long after the very name of that emperor is wiped out of history, the people of India will continue to revere Sarmad's memory and adore his heroic martyrdom.

In addition to the previously mentioned sources of information on Sarmad's early life, additional biographical sources for his later years in India include *Iqbal Namah-i Jahangiri* of Muhammad Sherif, also known as Mu'tamad Khan; *Nataij al-Afkar* of Mohammad Qudratullah Khan, *Majma'ul Nafais* of Siraj-ud-din Ali Khan Arzu* and *Atashkade Azar* of Lotfali-beyk Azar Bigdeli.

Some passing references are found in the works of two contemporary European writers who saw Sarmad in Delhi, *Travels in the Mughal Empire* by François Bernier and *Storia do Mogor* by the Venetian traveller Niccolao Manucci, who was a physician at the Mughal courts in Delhi and Agra from 1656 to 1702.

Mention must be made of the modern sources, including *Hind aur Pakistan ke Auliya (Saints of India and Pakistan)* written in Urdu by Shaukat Ali Fahmi and published by Deen Duniya Publishing Company, Delhi, which contains a ten-page chapter on the life of Sarmad. Then there is the *Sukhundan Faras* (The House of Poets of Persia) by Shibli, which contains Sarmad's rubaiyat.

Rubaiyat-i Sarmad, published by Mohammed Kurban Ali Bismil, gives an Urdu translation of Sarmad's rubaiyat, which were originally written in Persian (Farsi). The book is valuable and has a good introduction by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

* The library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta has two manuscript copies of Sarmad's verses, one by Ali Quli Khan under the title *Riaz-ush Shu'ara*, and another by Siraj-ud din Ali Khan Arzu under the title *Majma'ul Nafais*.

Sarmad's rubaiyat themselves, actually, disclose many facts not otherwise recorded in any historical work.

It appears that the life and personality of Sarmad, however, will remain a mystery—"an almost inscrutable problem".³⁷⁸ As noted earlier, information regarding his early life is sketchy and superficial and there is no unanimity among the authors even about the place and date of his birth. The tapestry of his biography that has been woven by various biographers with the material available is incomplete—but it is indeed interesting.

For the Adh Ganth, the Manuscript Stock 24443 number has been used; however, the standard page numbers from the Sri Ganga Ganth Sahib are given.

1. *Eastern Mysticism*, vol. I, p. 387.
2. "Jews and Judaism at the Court of the Moghul Emperors in Medieval India," *Islamic Culture*, vol. 25, p. 30.
3. *The Urdu Language*, vol. 2, p. 294.
4. "Jews and Judaism at the Court of the Moghul Emperors in Medieval India," *Islamic Culture*, vol. 25, p. 125.
5. Source not available.
6. *Qasida-i-Haq*, p. 272.
7. *Wahid*, Jan 1950.
8. *Madani Mela*, p. 9.
9. *The Mughals*, vol. 1, p. 348.
10. *The History of India*, p. 55.
11. "Sarmad—The Lizard Quatrains," *Islamic Culture*, vol. 2, p. 409.
12. "A Sketch of the Life of Sarmad," *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 20, p. 135.
13. *Urdu in the Moghul Empire*, p. 217.
14. "A Sketch of the Life of Sarmad," *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 20, p. 143.

Endnotes

Note that standard references have been given for classic texts wherever possible. At times the language of classic translations has been modernized, and when this alteration occurs the original translation is acknowledged by 'See [the source book]'.
34

For the Adi Granth, the Manmohan Singh (MMS) translation has been used; however, the standard page numbers from the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* are given.

1. *Eastern Mysticism*, vol.1, p.407.
2. "Jews and Judaism at the Court of the Moghul Emperors in Medieval India." *Islamic Culture*, vol.25, p.120.
3. *The Dabistan*, vol.2, p.294.
4. "Jews and Judaism at the Court of the Moghul Emperors in Medieval India." *Islamic Culture*, vol.25, p.125.
5. Source not available.
6. *Qanoon-i Ishq*, p.272.
7. Bible, *John* 10:30.
8. *Bhakta Mira*, p.9.
9. *The Philokalia*, vol.1, p.348.
10. *The Imitation of Christ*, p.85.
11. "Sarmad—His Life and Quatrains." *Islamic Culture*, vol.7, p.669.
12. "A Sketch of the Life of Sarmad," *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.20, p.120.
13. *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p.317.
14. "A Sketch of the Life of Sarmad." *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.20, p.113.

15. *The Peacock Throne: The Drama of Mughal India*, p.405.
16. *Storia do Mogor*, vol.1, p.215.
17. "A Dara-Shikoh Letter." *Indian Antiquary*, December 1923, p.359.
18. *Storia do Mogor*, vol.1, p.214-215.
19. *Storia do Mogor*, vol.1, p.363-364.
20. *The Book of Mirdad*, p.121.
21. *Masnavi*, book 4, 2138-2139. See *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, vol.4, p.390.
22. *Storia do Mogor*, vol.1, p.228.
23. "A Sketch of the Life of Sarmad." *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.20, p.115.
24. *Forty Poems from the Divan*, p.103.
25. *Sufi Symbolism*, vol.3, p.31.
26. *Omar Khayyam: A New Version Based upon Recent Discoveries*, p.74.
27. Qur'an, 2:256.
28. See *Bhakta Mira*, p.11.
29. *Sufis, Mystics and Yogis of India*, p.119-120.
30. *Kabir Sakhi Sangrah*, p.103:4, in *Kabir the Great Mystic*, p.238.
31. "A Sketch of the Life of Sarmad." *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol.20, p.116.
32. *Rumi, Poet and Mystic*, p.184.
33. *Rumi, Poet and Mystic*, p.143.
34. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV:3:21.
35. *Interior Castle*, in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p.132.
36. *Spiritual Maxims and Sentences*, in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p.132.
37. *Masnavi*, book 1, 3056, in *Rumi, Poet and Mystic*, p.93.
38. *Kabir Sakhi Sangrah*, p.44:10, in *Kabir the Great Mystic*, p.244.
39. *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, p.54-55.
40. *Masnavi*, book 2, 1720, in *Rumi, Poet and Mystic*, p.171.
41. *An Anthology of the Love of God from the Writings of Evelyn Underhill*, p.22.
42. *Yogasutra of Patanjali*, p.66, 3:1.

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43. *Narsi Mehta na Bhajano*, p.57.
44. *Narsi Mehta na Bhajano*, p.60.
45. *My Submission*, p.107.
46. *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p.22–23.
47. *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p.54.
48. *The Ring*, in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p.24.
49. *Philosophy of the Masters*, vol.3, p.xxi.
50. *Sant Bani*, p.45.
51. *Masnavi*, book 2, 2929, 2937. See *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, vol.2, p.373.
52. *Akha ni Vani*, p.49.
53. *Sarth Manache Shlok*, p.168:180.
54. *Sarth Manache Shlok*, p.169:81.
55. *Tukaramvachanamrit*, vol.3 of *Adhyatmagranthamala*, p.132: 393–394, 134:402.
56. *Kabir Sakhi Sangrah*, p.127:7–8.
57. *Kabir Sakhi Sangrah*, p.128:19.
58. *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p.61, 63.
59. *The Mystics of Spain*, p.33.
60. *The Way of a Pilgrim*, p.79.
61. *The Science of the Soul*, p.45.
62. *Hinduism and Buddhism*, vol.1, p.lxii.
63. *Freedom, Love and Truth*, p.25–26.
64. *Bharat ke Sant Mahatma*, p.766.
65. *Light on Sant Mat*, p.171:96.
66. *The Science of the Soul*, p.183.
67. *Bhakta Mira*, p.7.
68. *Kabir Sakhi Sangrah*, p.21:10, in *Kabir the Great Mystic*, p.265.
69. *The Science of the Soul*, p.18.
70. *The Book of Mirdad*, p.149–151.
71. Source not available.
72. *With the Three Masters*, vol.2, p.17.
73. Bible, *John* 1:14.
74. *Stromata*, in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p.230.
75. *The Philokalia*, in *The Way of a Pilgrim*, p.76.

76. *An Anthology of the Love of God from the Writings of Evelyn Underhill*, p.196.
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78. *The Way of a Pilgrim*, p.87.
79. *Sri Pran Sangli*, vol.2, p.6-7:63-64.
80. *Sar Bachan Radhaswami Nazam yani Chhand Band*, p.89:9:3.8.
81. *Diwan-i Niaz Breillvi*, p.91.
82. *Adi Granth*, MMS, p.117.
83. *Adi Granth*, MMS, p.18.
84. *Adi Granth*, MMS, p.19.
85. *Dariya Sagar, Dariya Granthavali*, vol.2, p.94:935-938.
86. *Adi Granth*, MMS, p.346.
87. *Spiritual Letters*, p.162:106.
88. *Spiritual Letters*, p.105:67.
89. *Philosophy of the Masters*, vol.2, p.xix.
90. *Light on Sant Mat*, p.117:13.
91. *Sakshatkari Sant Tukaram*, p.169:2391.
92. *Sakshatkari Sant Tukaram*, p.78:2392.
93. See *Bhakta Mira*, p.14.
94. *Kulliyat-i Bulleh Shah*, p.14.
95. *Qur'an*, 36:81.
96. *Masnavi*, book 1, 3453. See *Rumi, Poet and Mystic*, p.98.
97. *Discourses of Rumi*, p.178.
98. *Kulliyat-i Shams-i Tabriz ya Diwan-i Kabir*, vol.6, p.165.
99. *Diwan-i Niaz Breillvi*, p.90-91.
100. *Yasna 51:5*, in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*, p.776.
101. *Avesta: The Religious Book of the Parsees*, p.xviii-xix.
102. *Yasna 48:10*, in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*, p.685.
103. *Practical Metaphysics of Zoroastrianism*, p.112.
104. Source not available.
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106. *Khordeh Avesta*, p.352.
107. *Mazda Yasna*, p.203, 205.
108. See *The Zend-Avesta: Part 1: The Vendidad*, 19:1:9. The Sacred Books of the East Series, vol.4, p.206.

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109. Yasna 33:5, in *Abuna Vairya and the Argument of the Gathas*, p.31–32.
110. Yasna 45:5, in *Abuna Vairya and the Argument of the Gathas*, p.37.
111. Yasna 19:3–6, in *Abuna Vairya and the Argument of the Gathas*, p.1–2.
112. Yasna 60:12, in *Abuna Vairya and the Argument of the Gathas*, p.9.
113. Yasna 72:11, in *Abuna Vairya and the Argument of the Gathas*, p.9.
114. Yasna 46:10, in *Abuna Vairya and the Argument of the Gathas*, p.38.
115. Yasna 46:19, in *Abuna Vairya and the Argument of the Gathas*, p.39.
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117. Yasna 50:1, in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*, p.733.
118. Yasna 49:3, in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*, p.701.
119. *Kabir Sakhi Sangrah*, p.78:10.
120. Yasna 47:2, in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*, p.642.
121. Yasna 47:3, in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*, p.645.
122. *Message of Zarathustra*, p.97–98.
123. Yasna 34:4, in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*, p.362.
124. Yasna 43:9, in *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*, p.431.
125. Source not available.
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129. Yasna 31:18, in *Abuna Vairya and the Argument of the Gathas*, p.29.
130. Yasna 31:10, in *Abuna Vairya and the Argument of the Gathas*, p.28.
131. *The Way and Its Power*, p.193.
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Glossary

Ahura Mazda Lord of life (*ahu*) and of vast (*maz*) wisdom (*da*); or Lord of life (*ahu*) and creator (*dha*) of the vast (*maz*); a Zoroastrian term for the Supreme Lord; the absolute, unmanifested Lord.

Akbar (1542–1605) The third Mughal emperor of India, son of Humayun and grandson of Babur, Akbar was the greatest of the Mughal emperors. He regained much of the territory lost under his father, established just laws, encouraged commerce, and supported religious freedom and the arts and sciences. He founded a religion within his court which was based on a synthesis of Islam, Hinduism and Christianity.

Asha Truth, the primary source and foundation of all Zoroastrian virtues. Asha has many connotations, the chief of which are truth, purity and holiness. Asha is the cornerstone of the Zoroastrian religion—it is the great moral law based upon the will of God. As God and the great moral law are one and the same, so also Asha and Ahura Mazda, the Lord of life, are indistinguishable.

Aurangzeb (1618–1707) The third son of Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb, also called Alamgir, murdered two of his brothers and imprisoned his father, the Emperor, in order to gain succession to the Mughal throne. He practised and enforced an austere form of Islam, and persecuted Sufis, Hindus, Shia Muslims and Sikhs. The Mughal empire started to disintegrate after his reign.

Beas Masters Masters in the line of Radha Soami Satsang Beas, the satsang community founded in the year 1891 by Baba Jaimal Singh Ji to carry on the work of Soami Ji in the Punjab. Beas Masters teach the age-old path of the Word, a spiritual practice which enables souls to return to their true home and merge back into the Lord. The centre of this community is located in Beas and was named Dera Baba Jaimal Singh in memory of its founder.

bhakti Devotion, worship, adoration, obeisance; a spiritual discipline undertaken to please God, a deity or other revered being. Guru bhakti is devotion to the Guru—following a path of spiritual discipline in accordance with the Guru's instructions.

Caliph Anglicized form of the Arabic term *khalifah*; the title given to the successors of Muhammad, who are vested with absolute authority in all matters of State, both temporal and spiritual, as long as they rule in conformity with the laws of the Qur'an and Hadith.

dervish A mystic of the Sufi tradition, often one who has taken vows of poverty and austerity. Dervishes first appeared in the twelfth century and were known for their ecstatic dancing. They were known as dancing, whirling or 'howling' dervishes according to the practice of their order.

dhun Sound or melody; the heavenly music, the inner music or sound; the Word or Shabd.

faqir Arabic term for saint or Master; a Muslim sage.

Jamshid A mythological Persian king, Jamshid possessed a miraculous cup in which he could see the entire universe and all things past and future. Mystically, Jamshid's cup is a metaphor for spiritual or inner vision—the eye of the soul or the third eye.

Janak An ancient philosopher-king of saintly character, Janak was the foster-father of Sita, the wife of Ramachandra, who was the hero of the great Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*.

Ka'aba 'The house of God'; a shrine in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Muslims consider the Ka'aba to be the most sacred place on earth—the place where the divine touches the mundane. In whichever country they pray, Muslims turn in the direction of the Ka'aba.

maulvi Scholar of Islamic law.

Mecca Birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad; chief city of the Hejaz district of Saudi Arabia. Mecca is a place of Islamic pilgrimage called haj. Every devout Muslim is expected to perform haj at least once in his or her lifetime.

Mughal(s) Muslims of Mongol origin who established the Mughal Empire in India that began with Babur in 1526 and lasted for more than two centuries. The most powerful Mughal rulers included Humayun (1530–56), Akbar (1556–1605), Jahangir (1605–1627), Shah Jahan (1627–58) and his son Aurangzeb (1658–1707). The disintegration of the Mughal Empire began after the death of Aurangzeb.

mullah A Muslim priest.

Nam/Name The Name (*naam*) represents not only the dynamic power of God that created and sustains the universe, but also the current through which souls return to God. In order to elevate human consciousness, which normally operates at the gross level of mind and senses, the Name functions at two levels: at the human level as the holy names given for repetition by a true Master at initiation, and at God's level as the divine melody called Shabd, experienced through soul consciousness. *See also Shabd.*

Pir Master; a Muslim saint or holy man; from Persian *pir*, 'old man'.

qazi Administrator of Islamic religious law.

Qur'an The Qur'an (or Koran) is the sacred scripture of Islam, written in Arabic and revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the beginning of the seventh century. It consists of 114 chapters covering many different topics—spiritual, legal, social and scientific.

Radha Soami Lord (*swaami*) of the soul (*raadha*); the Lord of Anami, the highest spiritual stage; also the name of the stage itself. The name Radha Soami was also given to the nineteenth-century Saint, Soami Ji of Agra, who was believed to be Radha Soami's embodiment on earth.

Radiant Form The light or astral form of the Master that the Master places within the disciple at the time of initiation; also known as the Shabd Master because the Master projects this form from Shabd.

regions Refers to the five inner regions or spheres of consciousness that the soul crosses or experiences on its journey to God-realization: (1) Sahasdal Kamal (the thousand-petalled lotus, the astral region), (2) Trikuti (the three peaks, the causal region), (3) Daswan Dwar (the tenth door, also referred to as Sunn), (4) Bhanwar Gupha (the revolving cave, the region where the soul first recognizes its identity with God but is still separate from him), and (5) Sach Khand (the realm of truth, the region of pure spirit, where the soul merges into its source).

rishis One who sees, enlightened one, seer; a sage who has attained enlightenment through spiritual discipline.

rubaiyat Literally, quatrains; plural of *rubai*. Persian poets and mystics created the rubai, a short verse form of four lines, in which the lines have a specific fixed metre, and the first, second and fourth lines usually rhyme. Sarmad also wrote odes (ghazals), but only his quatrains (*rubaiyat*) have survived.

sadhu In general usage, an ascetic or mendicant; esoterically, a spiritual adept who has gone beyond the regions of mind and matter.

saint Mystic of the highest order. In Sant Mat literature the Hindi term *sant* denotes a God-realized mystic who has attained the region of pure spirit (Sach Khand). For lack of a better term, this word *sant* is translated into English as 'saint'.

Sant Mat The teachings or path (*mat*) of the Saints (*sant*). The term was popularized by the eighteenth-century Saint Tulsi Sahib and was adopted by Soami Ji of Agra. It refers to the teachings common to true saints (*sant*): the science of listening to the Shabd and merging one's soul with the supreme Creator.

Satan In the divine design there is provision made for an antagonistic force that is charged with keeping the soul in its present state of bondage to the creation and separation from the Lord. Saints in the Indian tradition have referred to this negative power as Kal to distinguish it from Dayal, or the positive power, namely, the Merciful Lord. He is known as the devil, Satan, or Lucifer in Judeo-Christian literature. Muslims call him Shaitan. Zarathustra (Zoroaster) calls him Ahriman, the opposite of the Merciful Lord, Ahura Mazda. Satan, or Kal, is not more powerful than the Lord, but rather, the Lord himself has given the management of the physical world into his hands.

Satguru True (*sat*) spiritual teacher (*guru*); a Master who has access to Sach Khand, the fifth spiritual region. In Sant Mat terminology, a Satguru is a saint who is ordained to take certain allotted souls back to God by initiating them into Surat Shabd Yoga.

satsang The company (*sang*) of truth (*sat*), association with the truth. In Sant Mat terminology, satsang ordinarily means the company of saints or advanced souls, or a gathering of devotees held under the auspices of a saint or Master, where the subject of discussion centres around God, the holy Name and the role of the Master. Satsang can also be used in its deeper sense, which is internal satsang, the association or union of the soul with Shabd.

Shah Jahan See Mughal(s).

Shabd Sound, voice, word, hymn; esoterically, the underlying current of divine energy that created and sustains the universe, also called Word, Name, Logos, Holy Spirit, sound current, unstruck music, the music of the spheres. It was through Shabd, the eternal power of God, that souls were sent down from their original home to inhabit the creation, and it is through the same power that they must retrace their journey homewards. However, no one but a living true Master can reveal the secret of Shabd and connect the disciple's consciousness to it. *See also* Nam/Name.

Shastras Literally, instructions, precepts. Hindu scriptures; Hindu books of philosophy and moral code.

Sufi An umbrella term for Muslim mystics.

Upanishads Literally, 'to sit near or close'. The Upanishads are the philosophical and mystical texts of the Vedas. The doctrines were so named because the secrets and mysteries were personally imparted to the disciple by the teacher.

Vedas Literally, knowledge; revealed knowledge as embodied in the four ancient Hindu scriptures (*Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Atharva Veda*). Also refers to Vedic literature in general, including the Upanishads and various interpretive texts.

Word See *Shabd and Nam/Name*.

yoga From the Sanskrit *yog*, meaning 'to yoke or join'; union. One of the six systems of Indian philosophy, yoga is believed to have been founded by the sage Yajnavalkya, and later codified by Patanjali in his *Yogasutra*. It is a form of mental and physical discipline, a code of ascetic practices of ancient origin meant to lead the human soul to union with God.

Yogasutra Literally, 'aphorisms of yoga'. A form of yoga described by Patanjali which describes an eight-step system designed to free the body and mind from restlessness and impurity and direct bodily and psychic energy towards higher consciousness and liberation.

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Adi Granth Primal (*aadi*) book or scripture (*granth*); also called the 'Granth Sahib'; the name given to the scripture that brings together the hymns of the first five Gurus and the ninth Guru in the line of Guru Nanak, as well as numerous saints from various parts of the Indian subcontinent. It is a mosaic of esoteric poetry by saints from various religious, cultural, vocational and geographic backgrounds whose teachings emphasize the oneness of God, the path of the Word, the equality of all people and the pursuit of truth. The Adi Granth was compiled by Guru Arjun, the fifth Guru, and completed in 1604. The hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru, were added by Guru Gobind Singh. The followers of the teachings of the Gurus have adopted the Adi Granth as their most sacred scripture.

Amar Das, Guru (1479–1574) The third successor in the line of Guru Nanak, Guru Amar Das, from the Punjab, came to his Master, Guru Angad, late in life at the age of sixty-one. He is credited with starting the institution of the langar (free community kitchen). His extensive writings are included in the Adi Granth.

Analects A collection of selected sayings by Confucius. The *Analects*, probably written after Confucius's death sometime in the fifth century B.C., is one of the most influential texts in Chinese literature. It consists of twenty chapters and includes

maxims and short discussions between Confucius and his disciples. In this text, the basic foundation of Confucian values, including humaneness, righteousness, filial piety and propriety, is set out.

Arjun, Guru (1563–1606) Son and disciple of Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjun Dev succeeded his father in 1581 to become the fifth Guru in the line of Nanak. He toured extensively in North India, giving spiritual discourses and initiation. In 1604 he completed the *Adi Granth*, a compilation of the teachings of the earlier Gurus in Nanak's line as well as his own, and those of a number of other saints from both Hindu and Islamic traditions. He died a martyr's death in Lahore in 1606.

Bahu, Sultan (c.1630–1691) Literally, with (*ba*) God (*Hu*). Hazrat Sultan Bahu, a disciple of Sayyid Abdur Rahman Qadiri, was one of the great Sufi saints of the Indian sub-continent. He was not formally educated, but is said to have written more than a hundred works in Persian and Arabic. However, it is his poems in the Punjabi language that live on and remain popular among the people of the Punjab.

Bhagavad Gita Literally, 'The Song of the Lord', the Bhagavad Gita embodies the teachings of Lord Krishna presented through the dialogue between Krishna and Arjun before the Mahabharata battle, and is one of the most popular books of Hindu philosophy. Renowned as a jewel of India's spiritual wisdom, its seven hundred concise verses provide a definitive guide to the science of self- and God-realization.

Bible The term Bible, or *Holy Bible*, refers to the sacred scriptures of Judaism and of Christianity. The Jewish Bible, written mostly in Hebrew, is divided into the Torah (five books

traditionally ascribed to Moses), Prophets and Writings. It recounts the history of humankind from the time of the Creation, the lives of the Patriarchs and early Israelites and the teachings of their prophets and holy men. The Christian Bible is made up of the Old Testament, which includes the books of the Jewish Bible, and the New Testament, which consists of writings pertaining to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and his disciples. It contains the four Gospels, the Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Book of Revelations (also known as the Apocalypse).

Buber, Martin (1878–1965) Austrian-born Israeli philosopher and mystic, Martin Buber was one of the major religious thinkers of the twentieth century, expressing his philosophy in his masterwork *I and Thou*. In addition to many philosophical works, Buber wrote numerous books on Hasidism and biblical interpretation and produced an acclaimed German translation of the complete Hebrew Bible.

Bulleh Shah (1680–1758) Born into an aristocratic Muslim family, Bulleh Shah grew up in Kasur, near Lahore, where he was educated in Arabic and Persian. He received spiritual light from Shah Inayat Qadiri of Lahore and incurred severe disapproval from his family and community for becoming a disciple of this simple, low-caste gardener. Bulleh Shah attained fame for his songs containing deep esoteric truths, many of which are still recited and sung in India and Pakistan.

Charan Das (1703–1782) This mystic poet from Rajasthan became a disciple of Sukhdev Ji at the age of nineteen, practising Surat Shabd Yoga for twelve years with great dedication before expounding the teachings of the saints. He spent the latter part of his long life in Delhi giving satsang and initiation. His disciples included Sahjobai and Dayabai.

Charan Singh (1916–1990) Born in Moga, Punjab, India, Maharaj Charan Singh was a disciple of Maharaj Sawan Singh of Radha Soami Satsang Beas. Maharaj Ji, as he was widely called, was a lawyer by profession. In 1951 Maharaj Jagat Singh made him his successor, and for the next four decades Maharaj Ji travelled throughout India and the world, giving discourses and initiating seekers. Teaching about the Word, he stressed looking beyond differences of race, culture and religion to the core of truth and love. He published many books on Sant Mat, available in many languages, including volumes of questions and answers, discourses, and letters to seekers and disciples. Before his death in 1990, he appointed Baba Gurinder Singh as his successor.

Chokha Mela (d. 1338) Born into an 'untouchable' community in Maharashtra, Saint Chokha Mela had no access to schools, education or holy books. A disciple of Saint Namdev, he worked tirelessly, never allowing his low social status to prevent him from speaking spiritual truth. In direct opposition to what the priests were saying, he taught that neither caste nor creed had any weight in spiritual life; only love for God mattered, only bhakti. This approach irritated the priests, and Chokha Mela was mercilessly persecuted for speaking out. His hymns are sung even today in Maharashtra.

Dadu (1544–1603) Born into a family of cotton carders in the state of Gujarat, Dadu Dayal was initiated at the age of eleven by Sri Bridhanand. When he was nineteen he began giving satsang in Jaipur and other parts of Rajasthan, constantly challenging the orthodox views of the day. He was known as Dadu the Merciful for his extremely compassionate nature. He wrote more than five thousand verses, hymns and aphorisms in Hindi on spiritual and philosophical themes, and it

is said that Akbar, the Mughal emperor, invited him to the court and listened to his discourses.

Dhammapada Literally, way or words (*pada*) of righteousness or spirituality (*dhamma*). The primary book of Buddhist scripture, the *Dhammapada* includes 423 verses attributed to Buddha regarding the Way of Righteousness. According to tradition, these verses are answers to questions put to the Buddha on various occasions, dealing with spirituality and moral life.

Gatha The oldest part of the Avesta, the holy scripture of the Zoroastrian or Parsee religion, the Gathas represent the teachings of Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra), and were possibly written by Zoroaster himself.

Gibran, Kahlil (1883–1931) Poet, mystic, philosopher and artist, Gibran was born in Lebanon, where he is considered the genius of his era. His fame and influence spread far beyond the Near East, his poetry being translated into more than twenty languages. In the United States, his home for the last twenty years of his life, he began to write in English and met Mikhail Naimy, who became his dear friend and biographer. After a lengthy illness, Gibran died in New York, but his body was returned to Lebanon and laid in the chapel of Mar Sarkis, an old monastery carved in a rock near Bsharri, reminiscent of the monastery called the Ark in *The Book of Mirdad* by his friend Naimy.

Hadith A body of traditional sayings and accounts of deeds and legends concerning Muhammad, the Hadith is a carefully preserved oral tradition from the time of Muhammad that has continued for hundreds of years. It constitutes the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Qur'an. Many of the hadiths were put into writing a few hundred years after Muhammad's death.

Hafiz (1326–1390) A Sufi poet-saint of Persia, Hafiz was born and died in Shiraz, where he was appointed court poet, falling out of favour for a while and then regaining his post shortly before his death. Hafiz is an honorific title meaning 'one who can recite the Qur'an by heart'; his real name was Khwajah Shams al-Din Muhammad al-Hafiz Shirazi. His compendium of love poems (ghazals), the *Diwan-i Hafiz*, is universally acknowledged not only as a work of great literary merit but also as one with great mystic import. His poetry remains popular today in the East and the West.

Hallaj, Mansur al See Mansur al-Hallaj.

Isaiah, Prophet (c.760–680 B.C.) Isaiah, son of Amoz, was one of the major biblical prophets. He condemned the moral shortcomings of the people and warned them that sacrifices were meaningless without morality. He advised them to put their trust solely in God, and his vision of the ultimate reign of God—when the lion shall lie down with the lamb and the sword will be beaten into a plowshare—has inspired many in the western world. Legend has it that he was martyred by being sawn apart at the order of King Manasseh.

Jagat Singh (1884–1951) Born in the village of Nussi, not far from Beas, Maharaj Jagat Singh was initiated when he was twenty-six years old by Maharaj Sawan Singh. Sardar Bahadur Maharaj Ji, as he was affectionately known, was considered by his colleagues and fellow disciples alike to be exceptionally devoted. Following his retirement in 1943 as Vice-Principal of the Punjab Agricultural College, Lyallpur, he spent the remainder of his life in his Master's service at Beas. In 1948 his Master appointed him to be his successor. During his three years as Master, he attracted followers from all over the world. *Science of the Soul*, a compilation of his

discourses and excerpts from his letters to seekers and disciples, was published after his death.

Jaimal Singh (1839–1903) Born into an agricultural family in Ghuman, Punjab, Baba Jaimal Singh, affectionately known as Baba Ji Maharaj, was initiated by Soami Ji Maharaj of Agra and appointed by him to carry on the Sant Mat teachings in Punjab. After retirement from military service, he chose a secluded place on the banks of the river Beas to pursue uninterrupted meditation, and soon seekers started visiting him, laying the foundation for organized satsang at Beas. Several months before his death in 1903, he appointed Maharaj Sawan Singh as his successor. It was the latter who named the place Dera Baba Jaimal Singh in honour of his Master's memory. Baba Ji Maharaj's letters to Maharaj Sawan Singh have been published in the form of a book entitled *Spiritual Letters*.

Jesus Christ (c.6 B.C.E.–30 C.E) Called Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Messiah, and Jesus of Galilee. The birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus are chronicled in the four gospels of the New Testament. He taught that the relationship of the soul to God is one of love, that the kingdom of God is within, that when the mind is fully focused at the third eye the Creative Word is heard as divine music, and that on hearing the "Voice of God" the soul rises up from the body and enters the higher heavens or mansions. Jesus's teachings, seen as a political threat both to the Roman government and to the Jewish authorities in Palestine, led to his crucifixion.

Jnaneshwar (c.1275–1296) Although he lived for only about twenty years, Sant Jnaneshwar wrote the *Jnaneshwari*, a paraphrase and commentary in Marathi on the central text of Hindu spirituality, the Bhagavad Gita, thus making this

text available to the common people of Maharashtra. He is credited with laying the foundation of the bhakti (devotional) movement in Maharashtra.

John, the Gospel of The Gospel of John is often called the 'mystical' gospel. Scholars now believe that it was the last of the gospels written and was composed too late to be the actual work of John, the disciple of Jesus; the text only states that it was written by Jesus's "beloved disciple". The Gospel of John differs from the other gospels in expounding primarily the teaching of the Word or Logos. When Jesus speaks in John's gospel, he speaks as the "Word made flesh".

Kabir (c.1398–1518) One of the best-known poet-saints of India, Kabir travelled widely, spreading the teachings of the saints. In Kashi (present-day Varanasi), one of the main centres of Hindu orthodoxy, he earned a meagre living as a weaver and faced unrelenting opposition from the priestly class for teaching people of all castes the vital need for a living master and the inescapable truth of the Word, karma and reincarnation. He attracted a large and diverse following, and was outspoken in condemning ritualistic observances, both Hindu and Muslim. The versatility and power of his poetry, written in vernacular Hindi, appealed to the common people struggling against the limitations of caste and a priesthood devoted to rites and rituals. His poems, some included in the Adi Granth, are still enjoyed today.

Kahlil Gibran See Gibran, Kahlil.

Kempis, Thomas à (c.1379–1471) Born in Germany, Thomas à Kempis was a theologian, writer and mystic renowned as the probable author of *The Imitation of Christ*, an important Christian inspirational work. He died in the Netherlands.

Khayyam, Omar (1048–1125?) Omar Khayyam was a mystic, mathematician and astronomer who gained fame for his Persian poetry, translated into many languages. *The Rubaiyat* by Edward Fitzgerald made him well known in the English-speaking world. Omar Khayyam was not an epicurean and wine-imbiber as Fitzgerald's translation would seem to indicate; the wine he mentions in his poems is symbolic of the inner Shabd, the mystic Word.

Lao-tsu See *Tao Te Ching*.

Mansur al-Hallaj (c. 857–923) A Sufi saint who travelled widely teaching the mystic way to know God, Mansur was a disciple of Amr ibn 'Uthman al-Makki. Mansur, an intoxicated Sufi, began to teach in Baghdad and attracted a large following. In a state of ecstasy, he proclaimed, "*Ana al-Haq!*" (I am God). For this perceived heresy, and because he lived in a time of great political unrest and uncertainty, he was imprisoned for many years and then tortured to death before a large crowd. Meeting his death with equanimity and forgiving his persecutors, he left behind many grieving followers, and his ecstatic writings and martyrdom are idealized in numerous songs and poems.

Matthew, Gospel of The Gospel of Matthew has been attributed to Saint Matthew, the tax-gatherer. It starts with the accounts of Jesus's nativity, continues with five parts that contain Jesus's sayings and stories about his life, and ends with his crucifixion and resurrection. This gospel is sometimes called the 'Jewish gospel' because of the evident Jewish background of the compiler. The date of composition is generally set at between 80 and 95 A.D.

Maulana Rum See Rumi.

Mira Bai (c.1498–1547) Born into a princely Rajput family, at eighteen Mira Bai was married to the Prince of Mewar. She was a devotee of Lord Krishna until she met her Guru, Ravidas, and was initiated by him. Persecuted by her family for following a cobbler saint, Mira disappeared from public life at the age of forty-eight. Her songs of devotion and longing are still popular throughout India.

Moses (c.1400 B.C.) According to the Bible, Moses, a Hebrew prophet and lawgiver, received the Ten Commandments from God. Born in Egypt, he led the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt to the outskirts of Canaan, the 'Promised Land'. Moses is mentioned frequently in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (where he is known as Musa), and in Sufi literature he is portrayed as *kaleem allah*, the intimate of God, one who could "talk with Him at will". The first five books of the Bible are attributed to him, but are more likely the work of several authors.

Muhammad, Prophet (c.570–632) The Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca and lived in what is now Saudi Arabia. Called 'the Messenger', his teachings became the foundation of Islam, and he taught the importance of worshipping the one God, Allah. The truth revealed to him is recorded in the Qur'an, and traditions concerning his life and teachings are found in the Hadith.

Naimy, Mikhail (1889–1988) Mikhail Naimy was a poet, critic, writer and mystic. He grew up in Lebanon, studied in Russia and emigrated to America. He was drafted into the army in 1918 and sent to the front lines in France. After the war he met Kahlil Gibran, who became his dearest friend, mentor and the subject of a biography. After Gibran's death in 1931, Naimy returned to Lebanon, where he wrote the

highly acclaimed *The Book of Mirdad*. Some believe that Mirdad, the fictional master, spoke with Gibran's voice, and that this book was Naimy's spiritual memorial to his friend.

Nanak, Guru (1469–1539) Born in Talwandi (now in Pakistan), Guru Nanak travelled widely in India and nearby countries to spread the doctrine of the Name. He endeavoured to transform the prejudices and superstitions of the people, emphasizing that ritualistic practices and external forms of worship kept the seeker of God away from the truth. His writings are preserved in the *Adi Granth*. He was the first saint in a line of ten Gurus, and appointed Guru Angad as his successor.

Nhavi, Sena See Sena Nhavi.

Niaz, Shah (c.1760–1834) Ahmad Breillvi Niaz wrote spiritual poetry in Arabic and Persian, and elegant treatises in Urdu on the unity of being, gaining disciples in Iran, India, Afghanistan, and Samarkand. He lost his father at a very young age and was educated by his mother until the family moved to Delhi when he was seventeen. He then began his spiritual education with Fakhir al-Din, who eventually directed him to move to Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh where he established a Sufi monastery and began writing.

Paltu (1710–1780) A grocer by profession, Paltu was the disciple and successor of Govind Sahib. Because of his rapid spiritual progress after initiation, it is said that his Master called him Paltu, meaning 'one who has been transformed'. Paltu fearlessly denounced the prejudices, superstitions and rituals of organized religion, asserting that people of any caste can worship God. For his bold utterances he was denounced, persecuted and finally burned alive by enraged local priests. His poems live on, published as *Paltu Sahib ki Bani*.

Paul of Tarsus (d. c.64) Saint Paul of Tarsus, also known as Saul of Tarsus, is believed to be the author of fourteen letters that became part of the New Testament. Paul admits that he was a youth at the time of Jesus's death and never met him, and that he had helped persecute the early Christians. He recounts, however, that he was converted on the road to Damascus through a direct experience of God, after which he became a devout and fervent follower of Christ, working tirelessly and fearlessly to spread the gospel. He died a martyr to the Christian faith in Rome.

Pritamdas (c.1500) Pritamdas was a sixteenth-century Gujarati poet-saint who composed numerous devotional shabds.

Qur'an The Qur'an is the sacred scripture of Islam, written in Arabic and revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the beginning of the seventh century. It consists of 114 chapters covering many different topics—sacred, legal, social and scientific.

Ravidas (c.1414–1540) Born into a low-caste Hindu family and poorly educated, Ravidas supported himself and his family by making and repairing shoes, many of which he sold for very little money or gave away to sadhus or the poor, thus angering his father, who banished him to a small hut in the backyard of the family house. His wisdom, gentle manner and humility had a great impact on the many people who came to him for spiritual guidance, including Princess Mira Bai and Raja Pipa. His poetry expresses great love and devotion for God. Forty of his compositions are preserved in the Adi Granth.

Rig Veda The oldest and most important of the Vedas, or books of Hindu knowledge, the *Rig Veda* is one of the four primary books of revelation in Hinduism. It was written in archaic Sanskrit, probably between 1500 and 1200 B.C.

Rumi, Jalaluddin (1207–1273) Also known as Maulana Rum, Rumi, who is the most famous of the Sufi poet-saints, was from Balkh in Khurasan, in northeastern Iran. His family settled in Konya in Rum (now in Turkey), hence his appellation Rumi. He made a deep study of Islamic scriptures and became one of the foremost scholars of his time. Around the year 1244, in his late thirties, he met the wandering dervish, Shams-i Tabriz, who became his Master. In 1247 Shams disappeared, and Rumi was desolate. Suffering the ache of divine longing, Rumi expressed his pain in poetry, composing his *Rubaiyat*, the six-volume *Masnavi*, and the *Diwan-i Shams-i Tabriz*, written in memory of his Master.

Samarth Ramdas (1608–1681) A Maharashtrian saint who lived in the seventeenth century, Samarth Ramdas urged people to forego empty rites and rituals, to seek the one true God and to bring the mind under control with the help of the inner Word and the company of saints. He was the author of thousands of devotional poems, many of which are collectively published in Marathi under the title of *Das Bodh*—literally, the realization (*bodh*) of a slave (*das*). He is not to be confused with Guru Ramdas, the fourth Guru in the line of Guru Nanak.

Sardar Bahadur See Jagat Singh.

Sawan Singh (1858–1948) Maharaj Sawan Singh, affectionately called the Great Master, was born in the village Jatana near Mehmansinghwala, District Ludhiana, Punjab. He was initiated by Baba Jaimal Singh, who designated him his successor in 1903. For the remainder of his life he assiduously served as the Master at the Radha Soami Satsang Beas, spreading the teachings of Sant Mat in India and abroad for forty-five years. His books include the *Gurmat Siddhant*, or

Philosophy of the Masters, an encyclopaedia of the teachings of the saints, as well as two volumes of letters written to Western disciples and a volume of his discourses.

Sena Nhavi (c.1300) A barber by profession, the Maharashtrian saint Sena Nhavi brought the teachings of the saints to the common people. Priests had had a stranglehold on religious teachings because the major holy books were in Sanskrit, so Sena Nhavi composed many verses in the language of the people, explaining that caste and creed have nothing to do with the ability to worship God—that with God only devotion or bhakti counts.

Shams-i Tabriz (1206–1248) Famous Sufi saint and wandering dervish from Tabriz (then in northern Iran), Shams was a disciple of Baba Kamal ud-Din Jandi, under whose shelter he attained a high spiritual state. Very little is known about him except that he was nicknamed Prandah (Flier). The great mystic Jalaluddin Rumi was his disciple. Shams disappeared from Rumi's life in 1247 under mysterious circumstances. If he wrote anything, none of his writings have survived; the *Diwan-i Shams-i Tabriz* was inspired by Shams but written by Rumi.

Shastras Hindu scriptures; books of philosophy and moral code.

Shiv Dayal Singh See Soami Ji.

Soami Ji (1818–1878) Seth Shiv Dayal Singh, known as Soami Ji Maharaj by his followers, was associated with Tulsi Sahib of Hathras from his birth, as his parents were disciples of Tulsi Sahib. He began meditating at an early age and spent seventeen years in deep meditation before he started teaching in 1861. In direct opposition to the priests of the age, Soami

Ji gave the universal teachings of the saints in unveiled, simple language that even the common person could easily understand. The author of *Sar Bachan Poetry* and *Sar Bachan Prose*, he is well known today as the first in the line of Radha Soami Masters. A few months before his death in 1878, he directed one of his disciples, Baba Jaimal Singh, to return to the Punjab and start satsang and initiation there. From that humble beginning, a spiritual colony of thousands has sprung up in Beas.

Tao Te Ching It is difficult to know much for certain about the origins of the *Tao Te Ching*, a fundamental Taoist text that espouses a way of simplicity, humility, and non-action. According to *Tao Te Ching* all things begin in Tao, exist in Tao and end in Tao. The text was probably compiled before the latter half of the third century B.C., but it is thought that the book is based on Chinese oral tradition that may even antedate the written word. The author of the *Tao Te Ching* is commonly referred to as Lao-tzu or Lao Tse (there are many variants in English), but modern scholars doubt that he actually existed. It is probable that 'Lao-tzu', which means both 'the old philosopher' and 'the old philosophy', refers to the ancient origin of the varied material within the text.

Thomas à Kempis See *Kempis, Thomas à*.

Tukaram (1598–1650) Reared in a well-to-do family of traders in Dehu in the District of Pune in Maharashtra, Tukaram was blessed with initiation by Babaji Raghava Chaitanya in 1619. He subsequently lost interest in the family business and became a mystic adept. During the remainder of his life, he composed thousands of poems denouncing all outward forms of worship. His poems, which remain popular even today, are published under the titles *Sarth Shri Tukaramachi Gatha* and *Shri Tukaram Bavanchya Abhanganchi Gatha*.

Tulsi Das (1532–1623) The well-known mystic-poet, Goswami Tulsi Das was a disciple of Narhari Das. His epic *Ramcharitmanas*, which described the path to Ram, the one Lord, based on the ancient story of the Ramayana, infuriated the high-caste brahmins. It is still a popular Hindi classic, assuring his place as one of the greatest medieval devotional poets. His *Ramcharitmanas* is still recited throughout India and is considered one of the greatest works of Hindi poetry.

Tulsi Sahib of Hathras (1763–1848) The great poet-saint of Hathras, author of the *Ghat Ramayana*, Shyam Rao, later known as Tulsi Sahib, was the elder son in the princely family of the Peshwas of Pune. He began to show signs of a devotional trend of mind at an early age, but he was forced into marriage. His father announced his retirement and appointed Shyam Rao as his successor. Disguised as a sadhu, Shyam Rao ran away from the court the day before his investiture and wandered for many years, finally settling in Hathras near Agra, India, where he was known as Dakkhini Baba. Soami Ji's mother was a disciple of Tulsi Sahib long before Soami Ji was born, and Soami Ji had contact with him from childhood.

Underhill, Evelyn (1875–1941) An English poet and mystic, Evelyn Underhill was an authoritative voice on mysticism in the twentieth century western world. Her life consisted of various forms of spiritual work. Her mornings were given to writing, mainly on Christian spirituality and mysticism, but also on the mysticism of different spiritual traditions, and her afternoons to visiting the poor and to spiritual counselling.

Upanishads The last of the philosophical and mystical texts of the Vedas, the word 'Upanishad' literally means 'to sit near or close'. The doctrines were so named because these secrets were personally imparted to the disciple by the teacher.

Distinguished for their transcendent breadth and powerful freedom of thought, they were added to the Vedas to reconcile the earlier teachings with the later teachings, and are also known as Vedanta.

Vedas Literally, knowledge; revealed knowledge as embodied in the four holy books of the Hindus, includes the *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. The Vedas deal with spiritual matters, divine powers of gods, sacred formulas (the mantras) and the problems of life in this world, revealing deep knowledge of the inner Word of God as a great power.

Zarathustra Spitama (c.1500–550 B.C.) A mystic from ancient Persia, Zarathustra, called Zoroaster by the ancient Greeks, was the author of many *gathas* (sacred verses), though only a small number have survived to present times. The Zoroastrian religion, known in India as the Parsee religion, was founded in his name, becoming the main religion of ancient Persia.

Zohar The *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Book of Splendour), believed by modern scholarship to have been mostly written by the Spanish Kabbalist, Moses de León (1240–1305), is one of the triad of the most sacred books of Judaism, the other two being the Bible and Talmud. It is the most influential work of the Kabbalah, the mystic tradition within Judaism. The unusual strength of the Zohar's mystical symbolism made a lasting impact on Jewish culture.

Zoroaster See Zarathustra.

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